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SPRINGBOARD  
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THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY  
NEW YORK

1943

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## FOREWORD

Early on the morning of November eighth Allied invasion forces struck simultaneously at half a dozen places in North Africa. From that moment news of our campaign poured out from innumerable points up and down the coast.

Obviously no one person could be everywhere at once, or could hope to tell the complete story. This could only be done by the collaboration of several of those who were there.

*Springboard to Berlin* is the work of four correspondents of the United Press.

John A. Parris, Jr. in the London office was in an excellent position to give us a glimpse of what went on before those convoys finally slipped through the Straits of Gibraltar. This he has done in Part I.

Leo Disher had the unique experience of actually sailing on H.M.S. *Walney*, which was sent to break the boom at Oran harbor. Part II, telling what happened, is one of the high points of the book.

Operations at Algiers are covered in Part III by Ned Russell, who landed there with the troops.

John A. Parris, Jr. went in with the troops at Arzu, close by Oran. He covers Oran in Part V. His familiarity with the whole picture has enabled him to provide also a portion (Part IV) on Casablanca and later (Part VII) a chapter on the Casablanca Conference.

That November-December dash for Bizerte and Tunis is covered by Ned Russell in Part VI. Attached to the British First Army, he went up the coast from Bône.

As Rommel made for home with Montgomery at his heels, the

# WALL TO WALL

action shifted to Southern Tunisia. Phil Ault was in the thick of the fighting at Kasserine Pass, El Guettar, and the other famous battles. In Part VIII he tells how the Americans won their spurs there.

The final knockout at Bizerte and Tunis was witnessed by Ned Russell. Part IX was sent by him to London. John Parris and Phil Ault, now in London, contributed to the section and got it into the hands of a naval officer bound for New York.

Meanwhile Ned Russell continued across the Mediterranean with the invasion forces. Part X, analyzing the breakdown of the Axis African army and describing the conquest of Lampedusa and most of Sicily was cabled to New York via London just as this book went to press.

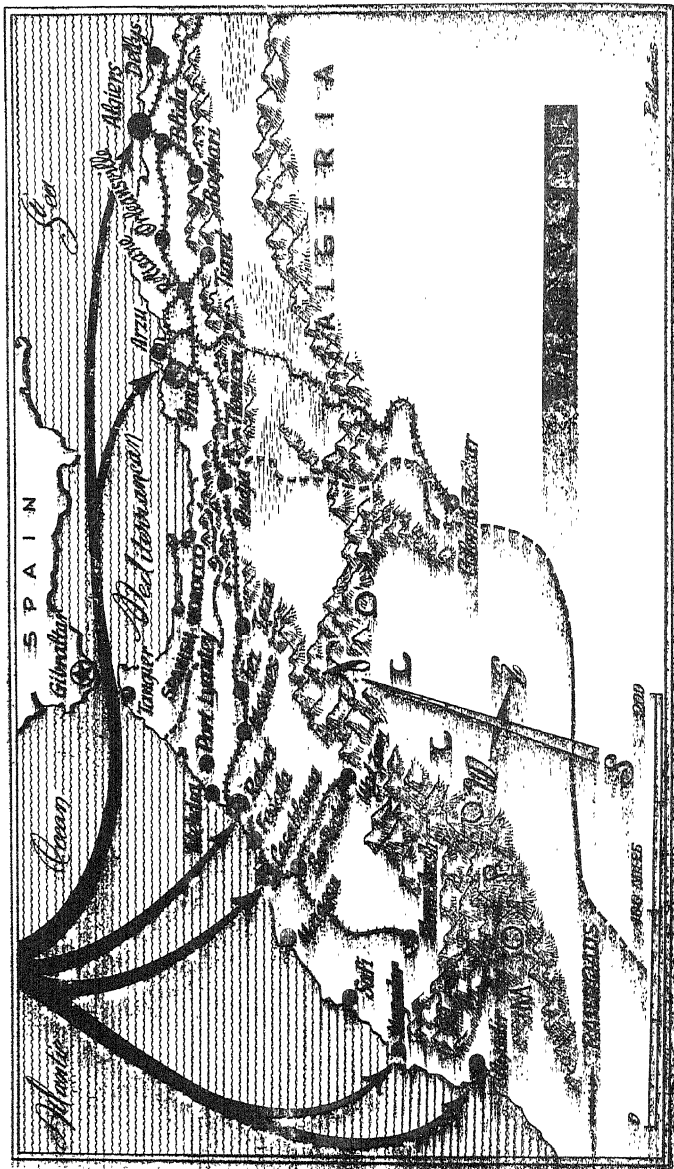
THE PUBLISHERS

## CONTENTS

PROLOGUE	3
I. THE GROUNDWORK, <i>by</i> John Parris	11
II. <i>H.M.S. WALNEY</i> , <i>by</i> Leo Disher	91
III. ALGIERS, <i>by</i> Ned Russell	127
IV. CASABLANCA, <i>by</i> John Parris	157
V. ORAN, <i>by</i> John Parris	181
VI. THE LONG CHANCE, <i>by</i> Ned Russell	199
VII. CASABLANCA CONFERENCE, <i>by</i> John Parris	271
VIII. SOUTHERN TUNISIA, <i>by</i> Phil Ault	283
IX. THE KNOCKOUT, <i>by</i> Ned Russell, John Parris, and Phil Ault	317
X. HEEL OF ACHILLES, <i>by</i> Ned Russell and John Parris	361
EPILOGUE	391
INDEX	395



## *PROLOGUE*



## *P R O L O G U E*

October, 1942.

Time was running out.

The Russians were fighting again with their backs to the wall. Stalingrad seemed almost ready to fall. The Germans were pulverizing the city with heavy guns, and the bombers came and laid their eggs and went away only to return again and again.

"Mama, I'm afraid." The little Russian girl hugged the rag doll closer to her. "Will they come and take us away?"

Stalin sat in the Kremlin. He was a patient man but his patience was running out. He wondered when the Americans and the British were going to fulfill their promise. The time was ripe for a second front. He needed help, needed it desperately.

Time was running out for Stalin.

A little group of eight American and British officers stood on a dimly lit platform of a London railway station. There was really nothing unusual about these men whom Destiny had picked for a strange mission. Just eight men in uniform standing on a platform waiting for a train.

The night was dark and rainy and everybody was feeling pretty dismal. There was nothing in the newspapers to make a man feel good.

The eight men stood smoking, talking casually among themselves. The tall American major general said something about the weather. The British commando captain asked him if he hadn't got used to the rain yet.

They had a long, dangerous trip ahead of them, these eight men. Some of them might not come back. Maybe all of them.

That's how dangerous it was. But if they were successful, the whole course of the war might be changed.

They had to take chances. The stakes were high and the chips were down. They were all gamblers.

The paratroop major had said good-by to the naval captain a few hours before. He had raised his glass and wished the captain, "Godspeed and astonishing luck."

The eight men were grim.

They were going to Africa.

The rain beat a steady, monotonous tattoo on the tin roof of the Nissen hut somewhere in the hills of northern Ireland. The single light that hung from the raftered ceiling gave off a pale glow. The room was stuffy and thick with cigarette smoke. The American lads cursed the day they came to this Unmentionable Isle. There was always rain and mud, mud and rain. Day after day, week after week.

"Christ," said the blond kid from California, "don't it ever stop raining over here?" He sat up in his bunk and flung the magazine he was reading into a corner. "Got a cigarette, Joe?"

The farm boy from Idaho looked up from the letter he was writing home, tossed a cigarette through the air. He sighed. "This doing nothing is getting on my nerves," he said. "Wonder when we'll see some action. Wish we'd get it over with and get the hell back home. I got a piece of farm land that's just a-wasting."

The guy from Brooklyn had his ear bent to the portable radio. He was listening to a sports commentary three thousand miles away. Back home the boys in Flatbush were hoisting a few and talking about "Leo the Lip" and Dixie Walker and Kirby Higbe.

"I can't figure it out," he said to nobody in particular but to everybody there. "Can't figure what the hell happened to the Dodgers. They were a cinch for the pennant. Bet my last cent on them. And what happens? They just blow up in the home stretch."

"Aw, shuddup," said the sergeant from St. Louis. "Bums! That's what they are. Just bums. What the hell else you expect? Now the Cards . . ."

The boy from the Tennessee hill country, up around Sergeant York's old stamping grounds, wasn't saying anything. He was busy oiling his Garand. Couldn't tell when he might get a chance to use it.

James Cagney was packing them in as George M. Cohan in the flag-waving epic, "Yankee Doodle Dandy," at the House of Warner in London's Leicester Square, and "Watch on the Rhine" was playing to full houses nightly. "Gone with the Wind" was in its third year and seemed set to run for the duration. The streets were swarming with American doughboys who had plenty of shekels in their pockets and were finding plenty of places to spend them. The natives were singing "Over There," "Franklin D. Roosevelt Jones," "I Got Spurs That Jingle Jangle," and "Chattanooga Choo Choo." The colonel and the private were humming the same nostalgic tune, "Oh, Ma, How I Miss Your Apple Pie."

The Running Horse was crowded as usual. Crowded with men in uniform. Crowded with men of half a dozen Allied Nations who had won their spurs in the Middle East. They were buying drinks for the Yanks who had yet to win their spurs. There were a few Canadians. They were fed up. They wanted to see some action. Christ! they'd been here two years now and, except for the Dieppe show which was bloody enough, hadn't seen even a good fist fight.

"Two years I'm telling you," the sergeant from Montreal was saying. "Two years and nothing to do but play soldier and drink yourself stinko. I'm telling you, pal, I sure thought I would have been in Berlin by this time or under six feet of earth with a Nazi bullet. Goddamn it, I want to get into a fighting war. Hope you guys don't have to sit around here twiddling your damn thumbs

that long." He tossed back a stiff one. "Have another drink, pal."

The guy from Chicago drained his glass and pushed it toward the bald-headed bartender. He offered the Canadian a cigarette and took one himself. "You had a tough break, pal," he was saying, "but I think we'll be seeing action soon. I got a feeling we'd better get in the drinking and hell-raising while the raising's good. Something tells me we're getting ready to move. And, buddy, when we do start moving we ain't gonna stop till we get to Berlin."

The bartender slid two drinks across the bar.

"Really think something's on the fire?" asked the Canadian. "God, I hope you're right."

"Yep, any time now," said the American. "We didn't come over here to sit around and enjoy the English weather." He grinned. "Eight months we been here. We got to start fighting and damn soon."

It was 9 P. M.

Radio Berlin was on the air and the Nazi announcer was babbling.

"The American commander in Britain, General Eisenhower," he was saying, "has gone to America. He has gone to confer with President Roosevelt. Things are in a bad way for the Anglo-Americans. They don't know where to move."

General Dwight David Eisenhower sat in his secret mobile headquarters, a railway sleeper of an English coach, somewhere on a siding in England. He smiled. Let the Germans think what they wanted to think. So much the better if they thought he was in the United States.

A map of Africa was spread out on his desk. There were papers scattered about. Papers marked "secret" which Adolf Hitler would like to see.

Three British officers from Combined Operations Headquarters sat about the table. Their work was almost finished.

It was time to put words and plans into action. Time to put the fear of God and the Four Freedoms into *Der Fuehrer*.

The big troopship swayed at anchor in the middle of the harbor. It was Sunday and the war seemed far away. The rain had stopped suddenly. The sun had broken through and was spinning golden mists over the green hills. There were other ships in the harbor—transports and freight ships, destroyers and cruisers and corvettes and long, high boxlike shapes that were aircraft carriers.

A submarine slipped along the surface, a British tar's head sticking out of the conning tower. A Sunderland flying boat circled overhead.

"Say, pal, do you know where we're going?" asked the boy from Georgia.

"You got me there," said the redhead from Ohio. "It sure looks like we're heading for trouble. And you can quote me as saying we ain't going on a pleasure cruise."

"Somebody," said the boy from Georgia, "said we're going to Norway."

"Yeah, heard that, too," replied the boy from Ohio. "But my sergeant says we're going home. I know he was kidding."

November 7-8, 1942.

Men and women stood in the factories over the land. Their arms rose and fell and the weapons of war poured down the assembly line. Sons were flying the bombers they turned out, carrying the guns they made.

The time-beat of war sounded in every home. Peace was but a memory and a hope.

It was 9 P. M. in Washington. The streets were crowded with the backwash of theaters. In London it was 2 A. M. The streets of the blacked-out British capital were almost empty except for a few soldiers on leave.

Millions of Americans were sitting around their radios listening to the Saturday night programs.

Franklin D. Roosevelt sat in the White House watching a clock, waiting for his telephone to ring. The second hand of the clock pounded around the racetrack of time.

Most of the British millions had long been in bed, but not Winston Churchill. He sat before an open fire in Number Ten Downing Street puffing a cigar. He was watching a clock, too, and waiting.

From a great naval armada off the African coast came a single code word radioed to Washington and London.

It was what Roosevelt and Churchill had been waiting for.

The telephone rang in the United Press office in Washington. The night editor yawned, picked up the receiver. A voice from the White House brought him out of his chair like a charge of electricity. The night editor turned to a teletype operator and shouted:

"FLASH!"

The soft music of the American dance bands was broken by the tense voices of the announcers:

"Ladies and gentlemen, we interrupt this program to bring you an important announcement. . . ."

There was awe in the voices of the announcers. The same awe that was in their voices the day they announced Pearl Harbor had been bombed. The millions of Americans who were listening to their radios sat up in their chairs and waited, for God knew what.

". . . A powerful American force, equipped with adequate weapons of modern warfare and under American command, is landing on the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of Africa. It provides an effective second front."

The word swept the land, reached into every home and every factory. The machines of war production turned faster and the arms of the workers rose and fell, swifter and swifter. America was at last on the march.

Then there was another voice on the air—in the United States, in Britain and France and throughout Europe. There was no awe in this voice. President Roosevelt was speaking in French.

"My friends, who suffer day and night under the overwhelming yoke of the Nazi, I speak to you as one who was in France in 1918 with your army and your navy.

"We are coming amongst you to repulse the cruel invaders who wish to strip you forever of the right to govern yourselves, to deprive you of the right to worship God as you wish, and to snatch from you the right to live in peace and security. . . ."

Somewhere in Vichy was a tired old man, the first hero of Verdun—was he listening?

" . . . Believe us, we do not wish to do you any harm. We assure you that once the threat of Germany and Italy has been removed from you, we will immediately leave your territory.

"Render your assistance, my friends, where you can, and we will see the return of the glorious day when freedom and peace will again reign in the world. Long live eternal France!"

Even as the President's message was being broadcast over and over again, in every language and to all the peoples of the earth, we were landing.

Pierre Laval rolled out of bed, dropped his feet to the floor, straightened his thick-set body and pulled on his pants. He put a call through to the Germans in Paris and then telephoned the old Marshal.

The drowsing Nazi telephone operator on the Chancellery switchboard in Berlin jumped as if he had been shot as a dozen buzzers began buzzing at the same time.

He looked at the clock. It was 2:30 A. M.

Goebbels' department telephoned the news to all chiefs and called a meeting at the Propaganda Ministry for 3 A. M.

Goering, roused at Karinhall, called for urgent meeting at 5 A. M.

Hitler, roused at 2:45 A. M., called for staff meeting at 6 A. M. For *Der Fuehrer* it was the biggest shock he had ever suf-

fered. He got the wind up and his troops moving. He sent them into Vichy France on the double-quick and sent them into Tunisia by air.

Winston Churchill said it was the end of the beginning.

PART I

*THE GROUNDWORK*

*By John Parris*



## CHAPTER ONE

PEARL HARBOR. Tojo, Hitler, and Mussolini. They took America to war. Overnight the conflict which had belonged to others became America's battle. Across the land swept the call, "Johnny, get your gun!" And Johnny got his gun. He said good-by to his folks and walked up the gangplank of a gray troopship and sailed away to fight the enemies of mankind, just as his dad did in '18.

Johnny sailed for the British Isles. Beyond was a shackled Europe waiting to be freed.

I first saw Johnny standing by the rail of an old gray hulk as it slipped into Belfast harbor. He was a grim-looking lad, about twenty-one. A cold January rain was blowing down from the Irish hills. It was less than two months after Pearl Harbor.

The general tapped Johnny on the shoulder. "You're to be the first man ashore," he said. "Get ready."

"Yes, sir," replied Johnny. He moved through the mass of men in khaki that crowded the rail. A lot of other Johnnies with grim faces and peculiar lumps in their throats.

The general was at his side again. "By the way, soldier," he said, "what's your name?"

"Henke, sir. Milburn Henke of Hutchinson, Minnesota."

"German descent?"

"Yes, sir. My father was born in Germany. He's an American citizen now. He's got a restaurant back in Hutchinson. I had to promise him I would give the Nazis hell the first chance I got. I intend to do that, sir."

The general smiled. He patted Private Milburn Henke on the back.

The troopship slipped into its berth. Some dock hands moved the gangplank into position.

Private Milburn Henke took eleven steps down the gang-plank. As his foot touched British soil, the Royal Ulster Guards band began playing "The Star-Spangled Banner." Arms slanted. There were tears in the eyes of the few Americans who had come from London to welcome the first American troops.

"Christ!" shouted a boy from Carolina. "Anybody know where we are?"

"Ireland," said a British soldier.

"What do you know about that," said the boy from Carolina. "When you start out these days you never know where you'll end up. So this is Ireland. Where's those colleens I heard so much about?"

Johnny didn't get to see the colleens that day. He was being moved around too fast. He slogged through a cold rain to a waiting lorry and was hustled off to a camp somewhere in the hinterland. It was a camp of tin houses. The British called them Nissen huts.

"Just a tin shanty-town, that's what it is," said a guy from Jersey. "Brother, we sure got something here. Tin houses and rain. What a combination!"

Johnny settled down in northern Ireland to train and toughen up for that day when he would swarm onto the enemy's beaches and blast a trail to Berlin and Rome.

An endless tide of Yanks in endless numbers followed Johnny over the sea to the Emerald Isle. Convoy after convoy zig-zagged its way across the Atlantic, dodged German U-boats and fought off German planes.

Johnny went to Scotland and Wales and England. He learned to like the people. He became a bosom pal of the pub-keeper and learned about England from him. Johnny heard all about the dark days. His admiration for the British increased. They were people with plenty of guts.

"After Dunkirk," the pub-keeper told him, "we had a tough time. We expected invasion any moment. Jerry sent his planes over and gave us hell. But we held on and we're still here."

In the long, hard, bitter months since Dunkirk, Britain had become the greatest fortress in the world. Preparation against invasion had brought hundreds of thousands of Canadian and Empire troops from over the seas to stand guard. More than four million armed men were packed in the tight little isle.

Johnny palled around with Canadian and Australian soldiers who champed at the bit day after day, week after week, for a chance to take up their guns, fix their bayonets, cross the Channel and meet the Germans who had pushed the British off the Continent when France crumbled like a house of cards under the mass weight of the Nazi steamroller. He talked to civilians who had survived some of the greatest air attacks the world had known up to that time. He drank with the boys from the Spitfire squadrons who had cleared the skies over Britain. He played poker with the young veterans of the heavy bombers who had winged across the channel and carried the war into Germany.

Johnny, who had never fired a shot in anger, heard about war from men who had seen the hell of war from behind a rifle or a machine gun. He wondered when his turn would come. As he wondered the wheels of action began slowly turning back home.

The dogwood was blossoming on Capitol Hill and Washington was busy and crowded. General Dwight David "Ike" Eisenhower left his hotel and walked through the beautiful spring morning to the War Department. General George C. Marshall had sent word that he wanted to see him.

General Eisenhower was ushered into a big room whose walls were covered with maps. There was a big desk at one end. General Marshall sat behind it. "Good morning, Ike," he said. "Take a chair."

"Good morning, George." Eisenhower took a chair.

"When can you leave?"

Eisenhower's frank, blue eyes widened. "Why, tomorrow morning," he gulped.

Twenty-four hours later "Ike" Eisenhower was in a bomber

flying east over the Atlantic. He landed somewhere in England and hurried to London by car. He got down to work fast.

He gathered his staff about him in a neighborhood of hotels and flats on a square dubbed "Eisenhower Platz." "Ike" Eisenhower looked over the situation. His work had been cut out for him. He had been given one of the biggest tasks ever assigned an American general. The job of planning and preparing a U. S. invasion of the Continent. It wasn't easy, but "Ike" Eisenhower had long been known as a man with a star in his pocket, meaning in army parlance a man to watch.

"Ike" Eisenhower found himself with an amateur army of mechanics, salesmen, bartenders, boxers, bond and insurance salesmen, cowboys, and lawyers. This was the 1942 A.E.F. They were green but they had learned something about tactics back home on maneuvers in North Carolina and Louisiana. They were still far from ready for combat.

"We've got a tough job ahead of us," Eisenhower told his staff. "We've got to whip this army into fighting shape, and fast."

He sent his boys slogging on forced marches through the hills of England, Scotland, Wales, and northern Ireland.

*God, my feet are killing me!*

They lived on iron rations and practiced under actual gunfire.

*What I wouldn't give for a hamburger with onions.*

*Better keep that head down, bud, or you'll be pushing up daisies.*

They were taught how to gouge out a man's eyes, slip a knife between his ribs. They were trained to kill.

*My old lady never intended I should grow up to make a living this way.*

Booted parachute troops dropped from big silver-starred transport planes, pretended they were attacking Berlin or Rome and dreamed of the day when some of them might be lucky enough to drop in on Hitler or Mussolini for a personal visit.

*You never make but one mistake in this racket, pal.*

*If your 'chute don't open come back and we'll fix you up with another one.*

Rangers practiced landing assaults and commando-style mayhem. They lived in the open, slept in the rain, swam rivers and lakes in full kit, learned all the little tricks of close hand-to-hand combat.

*That guy Tarzan's got nothing on us.*

A few of them went with the Canadians to Dieppe and saw the hell of war. It was their first encounter with the Germans. They found them tough. A boy from Iowa, Corporal Franklin M. Koons of Swea City, knows. He went in with the Canadians. He was the first American soldier to set foot on French soil in this war. The British decorated him with the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

"I was scared to death until a Britisher right near me got hit," Koons told his buddies when he returned from Dieppe. "Then a bullet damned near took my hand off. Suddenly I wasn't scared any more. I was hopping mad."

It was August and time was running out. Roosevelt and Churchill had promised the Russians a second front before the end of the year.

Major General Mark W. Clark of Madison Barracks, New York, a soldier's soldier in charge of training ground troops for invasion of the Continent, went to see his chief.

"I figure my men can use another six months of training to be in tip-top fighting form," he told Eisenhower, "but I reckon the time might be considerably shortened."

"You've only got two months."

The tall, poker-stiff forty-six-year-old Mark Clark was pleased. He wanted action, wanted it badly.

"The sooner the better," he said.

Mark Clark was offensive-minded. He talked often and pointedly about a second front. He was a veteran of World War I. He had learned a lot in that first scrap and had been learning ever since. His creed was that every fighting man in Uncle Sam's

army should be taught to fight with any weapon, fight from a tank, a truck, a boat or on foot. Especially on foot. His chief complaint was that the army was becoming road-bound.

"There's something else," said Eisenhower. "It's a big assignment and dangerous. There's a large group of Frenchmen in North Africa anxious to cooperate with us. It's essential to send a staff of professional officers to contact and make use of these men and obtain essential information." He paused. "I want you to go."

## CHAPTER TWO

ONE by one they arrived at Paddington Station, one by one until they were eight. Each muttered something profane about the weather. It was a filthy London night. Dark and rainy and cold, unusually cold for October. The eight men stood smoking, talking casually among themselves. They wore American and British uniforms.

The late commuters were too absorbed in groping through the dimly lit platforms or reading the headlines by the glimmering light to notice the little group. There was really nothing unusual about these men to attract attention. Just eight men standing on a platform waiting for a train. Or so it seemed to the commuters.

But they had a long, dangerous trip ahead of them, these eight. They were going to Africa—by train and plane, submarine, mule and rowboat. Their mission was of vast historic importance. They were embarking on one of the most incredible advance-guard "spying" expeditions in history.

The tall man who towered head and shoulders over the others was Mark Clark, head of the historic party. With him were Brigadier General Lyman Lemnitzer of Honesdale, Pennsylvania; Colonel Archelaus L. Hamblen, a native of Maine; Colo-

nel Julius C. Holmes, former member of the American Diplomatic Service; Captain Jerauld Wright, U. S. Navy, of Washington, D.C.; three British commando officers—Captain C. J. Courtney, Captain R. T. Livingstone, Lieutenant J. D. Foot.

Each man had a specific task, for the plans were well drawn and their itinerary was calculated to work with clocklike precision and, at the same time, give them enough latitude for efficient action if any snags developed.

Wright looked at his watch in the smothered light. "Our train seems to be a little late," he said. Hardly were the words out of his mouth when the train pulled into the station.

Clark picked up his bag. It seemed unusually heavy. It was a battered old gladstone but it had a new lock, a combination lock. He walked a few yards down the platform and spotted an empty compartment. He opened the door and climbed in. The others followed. Wright was the last in. He closed the door and latched it. The train jerked and then started moving.

The eight men rolled southwest through the rainy night.

"Is your ship fueled and ready to go?" the air force colonel asked.

"Yes, sir," the blond young major replied. "The boys are giving it a final check now."

"We've got to be sure nothing goes wrong. Understand? You know what your job is. No further instructions. Better get moving."

The major turned, walked out of the squat little headquarters building and across the field toward his big ship. It was just getting light. He looked at the sky. The clouds were rolling across it. The rain had stopped. The wind had died down. It was going to be a good day for flying.

"Everything's all set, sir," said the grease monkey with the three stripes on his arm as the major walked up. "She's just raring to go."

"Gassed and plenty of ammo?"

"Yes, sir," replied the sergeant. "Say, major, where we going? Berlin?"

"Not this time. We're heading south."

Two army cars pulled up under the wing of the Flying Fortress. Eight men got out. One carried the battered old gladstone bag. They scrambled into the ship.

"Glad to have you aboard, sir," the major greeted each of the eight.

There was a roar of motors as the big ship lumbered onto the runway. She stood there a moment trembling, and then she roared down the black runway and soared into the air.

The eight men settled back in their cramped quarters and relaxed.

The long, black hulk broke surface somewhere off the French North African coast. Her motors idled. The sky was star-specked and the moon was on the wane. The shore was dark and silent.

A British naval officer crawled out of the conning tower. His night glasses swept the shore. He seemed satisfied, for he barked some orders back down the dark hole. Six British tars joined him. They went to work putting a boat in the water.

And then eight men climbed out of the conning tower. They stepped into the little boat. Four of them picked up oars. They pushed off from the submarine and began rowing toward the dark shore.

"Watch those oars," cautioned a voice with an American accent. "Make as little noise as possible."

The oars dipped, rose, dipped. There was only a light swish. The oar-locks creaked and cried with each stroke. The creaking, crying sounded unusually loud to the eight men whose ears were pitched for the least sign of danger.

They rowed on silently for twenty minutes. The boat touched the sandy beach. Mark Clark slipped over the side into the

water. The three British commando officers followed him. The water reached to their knees and it was cold. They worked the little boat onto the beach. The others hopped out. They pulled the little boat into a sandy hollow and covered it with brush.

Mark Clark looked at his watch. "It's almost time." He led the little group up a little slope and into some bushes. "There's the house." A farmhouse loomed before them in the darkness. "We should see a light any minute. That will be the signal everything is okay."

The eight men huddled in the shadows waiting for the signal. Minutes passed. Then two, three, four hours. Something had gone wrong. It was getting light. Couldn't stay there. Too dangerous. They found a gulley shielded by heavy bushes. They plopped into it. Nobody said a word. Nobody dared light a cigarette.

The sun came up and the hours dragged by. Some of them tried to catch a little sleep. They ate the chocolate and the tinned rations they had brought along. It seemed the day would never end.

Then the sun fell and night came with suddenness.

The eight men stirred in their refuge. Clark whispered, "We'll try again." Arrangements had been made for just such an emergency. If they didn't find the coast clear they were to come back at a new and prearranged time.

They waited again for hours behind bushes and trees, scarcely whispering and not even smoking. Finally, a light flickered in the windows of the farmhouse, and the party of eight moved in.

They entered by a back door, one at a time.

The owner of the house, which was dimly lighted except for the signal, greeted Clark.

"I sent my wife away on a vacation," he explained. "I told my Arab servants to take a few days off."

The house was filled with French military officers in uniform, although they had come in civilian clothes. Clark and his party

conferred with them all day and all night, stopping only to cook their own meals, until they had gathered all the information they wanted.

Meanwhile, the Arab servants who had been dismissed for safety's sake by the head of the household, had decided something suspicious was going on and they had reported to the Axis-controlled Vichy police. But the conference received word that the police were on the way.

Things began happening quickly.

Maps disappeared like lightning. A French general in military uniform changed into civilian uniform in a minute. Other French officers went in all directions.

Clark and his staff gathered papers and guns and hid in an empty wine cellar. Upstairs they could hear the owner of the house talking to the police.

One of the commando officers was seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to cough.

"I'm afraid if I hold back this cough any longer," he whispered, "I'm going to choke to death."

"I'm afraid you won't choke," Clark told him.

The American general was crouching with a revolver in his hand. He had fifteen thousand francs in his pocket. He didn't know whether to shoot the police or try to bribe them if they came down.

But after an hour of suspense, the police left.

The members of the mission gathered their effects together and also departed.

They made their way back to the rowboat. The weather was rough that night for such a small boat and each of the eight officers took off his uniform and tied it into a bundle. In another bundle they tied more than seven hundred thousand francs. The money had been carried in case bribes were needed.

Suddenly, the boat capsized. Clothes, money, oars, generals, captains, and lieutenants were thrown into the water.

"Save the clothes," one of them yelled.

"To hell with the clothes," Captain Wright yelled back. "To hell with the bundles. Save the oars."

They scrambled ashore. They had managed to save their papers, which contained all the invaluable data for which the hazardous expedition had been made.

"I've lost my pants," General Clark exclaimed. "And eighteen thousand dollars in gold! I wonder if Morgenthau will get after me for that."

In underclothing they hid all day in some woods, cold and shivering, walking about to keep warm.

At length they reached a point that must be kept secret. From there they were transported out of North Africa.

The eight men returned to London eight days after they had left. What they brought back was the key to North Africa.

"I am exceedingly proud of all of them," said General Eisenhower. "They took great risks and accomplished their work. It was a modern message to Garcia."

That was the way the African campaign began.

### CHAPTER THREE

THE first days of October found a strange, expectant atmosphere shrouding official London. The man in the street didn't notice it particularly. He was too absorbed in the news from Libya. But the boys whose job it was to keep the public informed could "smell" something in the air.

"I've got a hunch something's about to break," Bill Dickinson said one morning when I walked into the office. "I'm offering a pound to ten shillings we'll invade Europe before Christmas."

"I'll take some of that money." I yelled across the newsroom to Ned Russell. "What about you, Ned, want some of Dickinson's easy money?"

"Yeah, put me down for a couple of pounds. I always win from Dickinson. What's he betting on now?"

"Invasion of Europe before Christmas."

"Easy money, easy money," said Russell.

A few minutes later Ed Beattie and Dickinson went into a private huddle. They talked in whispers. "Pretty substantial, don't you think?" Dickinson asked. Beattie nodded his head. "Yep," he said.

"Taking any Dickinson money, Ed?" I asked.

He grinned. "Not this time. Looks like Bill's got a winner at last."

Beattie sat down at a typewriter and typed for a couple minutes. He handed me the note. It was to the staff of war correspondents. "To all accredited correspondents," it began, "please see that you have your entire kit this week—uniform, field clothes, bedding roll, gas mask, steel helmet, canteen, etc. If you lack any of these items, draw them from the quartermaster's at once. This is a must."

I put the message on the office message spike and turned to Beattie. "Is this it, Ed?" He grinned. "What do you think? All I can say is, you'd better get your equipment if you don't have it."

Dickinson called to me, "Censor wants to talk to you, John, about that Norwegian story." I had just submitted a story on reports that the Germans were speeding up fortifications along the Norwegian coast. The Germans were understood to be getting the jitters over the possibility of an Allied invasion in the north.

"We're stopping all stories mentioning the possibility of an Allied invasion," the censor said. I argued that there was no security involved in this story, this was something that had come out of Norway. "Sorry," the censor said, "but those are my orders."

That afternoon I met Russell in front of army headquarters. "Just going to see the doctor," he said. "Come along and get stuck."

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"You mean you haven't heard? Beattie's just left another note. We've all got to get vaccinations and inoculations this week. Looks like something's getting under way."

We met Phil Ault and Chris Cunningham, two more of our war correspondents, coming from the doctor's office.

"At the rate we're going now," said Ault, "there'll probably be a note when we get back to the office telling us to hop a boat for Europe."

Russell and I dropped in later to see Colonel Krum. He offered us a coke and after we had batted the breeze for a while, he said, "Have you boys seen the new directive I just got out?" We said no. "Well, you know one of these days the big show's coming off. To insure the utmost secrecy, all correspondents assigned to the American armed forces are being told to bring along full field equipment when they are called to go on a sortie. So when you get a call to visit an army camp or an air-drome bring along your kit. It may be the real thing. Don't take any chances. And don't say I didn't warn you."

Things were happening so darn fast, you wondered if it was a good idea to make any sort of an appointment less than twenty-four hours ahead. I noticed that Beattie was spending more and more time around army headquarters and after working hours with several high army officers. Beattie, Russell, and I usually dined at a little place in Orange Street, "Sandy's." Recently Beattie had been absent.

"Missed you last night," became a stock greeting each morning when Beattie came into the office. "Couldn't make it," he would say. "I was out with General So-and-So or Admiral This-and-That."

A few days later I was sitting at my desk when the telephone rang. It was Major Joseph Phillips. "Parris," he said, "can you drop over to my office about three o'clock?"

"Sure thing," I replied, and hung up. You didn't ask ques-

tions such as, What's it all about? these days. Phillips, who in private life had been managing editor of *Newsweek*, was head of public relations in the European theater of operations.

I looked at my watch. It was 2:35 P. M. My desk calendar showed that it was Wednesday, October 21, 1942.

Turning to Dickinson, I explained, "Going over to see Phillips. You can get me there if you need me."

I hailed a cab in Fleet Street and directed the Cockney driver to "Eisenhower Platz," that quaint old square where you only see an Englishman when he gets lost, which is seldom if ever. For Eisenhower Platz is a bit of America stuck in the heart of London, as American as Brooklyn or Dallas or Chicago or 'Frisco. The only touch of Britain is the lone bobby who walks up and down in front of the American Embassy, and the boys from back home are not so sure that he's all English. He chews gum, and who ever heard of an Englishman chewing gum!

As the cab rolled through the crooked streets, down the Strand, past the great lions in Trafalgar Square where Nelson looks down from his towering perch, I wondered what Phillips had on his mind.

Ten minutes later the cab pulled up in front of the big red-brick building that is U. S. Army Headquarters in London. The armed guard greeted me as usual, "Hi, Joe," and I passed into the lobby where a group of my colleagues were in a huddle—Beattie, Bill Stoneman of the *Chicago Daily News*, Drew Middleton of the *New York Times*, Robert Bunnelle of the Associated Press, Bill White and Joe Evans of the *New York Herald Tribune*.

"What's up?" I asked Beattie.

"Big Fortress raid," he replied.

Then Joe Phillips showed up. "Let's go up, boys," he said, leading us to the elevator which swept us three floors skyward. He ushered us into a little office where there were a dozen chairs crowded about a desk. Behind the desk was Brigadier General Robert McClure, head of the mysterious American

army organization known as G-2, which is intelligence. His field was the European theater of operations.

We found chairs while McClure closed the French doors. I looked over our little group—Beattie, Evans and White, Bunelle, Stoneman, Ray Daniels and Frank Kluckhohn of the *New York Times*, and Noland Norgaard of the Associated Press.

McClure broke the silence. "This is it," he said. Suddenly I realized this was no ordinary press conference. "White, Parris, Norgaard, and Kluckhohn have been selected to cover the Second Front." He said it so casually. "We will invade the continent from six points."

I looked across the room at Beattie. He was grim. He returned my look, slowly nodding his head as if to say, "Yep, this is it, pal, and you've got yourself an assignment." The Continent from six points! I visualized those points—Norway, Holland, France, Italy, Greece, Jugoslavia. When folks over here talked about the Continent they always meant Europe.

"I don't have to tell you," McClure said, "that secrecy is of the greatest importance. I'm not telling you where you are going. Each of you will be told that when you have reached marshalling points. You are all well-known correspondents in London. You get about. People see you every day. If you suddenly disappear people are going to start asking questions. You must leave London without causing suspicion. Just tell your wives and sweethearts that you are going on maneuvers. Don't even mention that to anyone else. You will be traveling with officers and soldiers. Many of them won't know where they are going either. Naturally, some of them will. So, please, don't ask any questions. You will find out in due course. Just be patient."

McClure didn't seem so tense now. He lit a cigarette. Most of us had been dying for a cigarette, so we all lit up. It took the edge off our nerves.

"I want you fellows to bring your field equipment and one bag to the embassy before nine o'clock tonight," McClure ex-

plained. "Be sure it is dark when you start. Try not to be seen. There will be somebody there to take your stuff."

"I don't have a bedding roll," Norgaard said. "Quartermaster is out."

"I'll see to that," said Phillips.

We still didn't know when we were leaving. But McClure explained. "Parris and Norgaard will leave first. You will meet at ——" He mentioned the name of a secret operations headquarters in an out-of-the-way London district. "Be there by eight o'clock in the morning. Don't come together. And don't be late. You might get left."

White and Kluckhohn were told to go to the same place, only a couple of hours later.

"That's all, gentlemen, and the best of luck." McClure got up and came from behind his desk. He shook hands with each of us.

We shuffled out of his office like sleep-walkers. Beattie was unusually quiet. Down in the lobby, Ed told me that Ned Russell was going with the British First Army. Stoneman was going too.

I heard that Middle was going with the British Royal Navy as representative of all the American news agencies and newspapers. His stories would be pooled.

Stoneman and Middleton believed that we were going to Norway. They seemed to think that the big operation would be pulled off there with smaller efforts at other points on the Continent.

"You know, Doctor," Stoneman said to Beattie, "I think I'll take my skis." Bill had lived in Norway and Sweden and was an expert skier.

"You can't do that, Bill," Ed argued. "Suppose somebody saw you walking about London with a pair of skis. Right away they would know you were going some place where there was snow. And there isn't any snow in Britain. Besides," Ed added, "if you did take them you would have an unfair advantage over

the other fellows. While they were mushing along you would be sailing over the hills."

Bill looked a bit disappointed. He shook his head sadly. "Doctor, you sure do make things easy, but I guess you're right. Be fun to have them, though."

(A few months later when Beattie was leaving for North Africa to cover the Tunisian campaign, he cabled Stoneman: "See you soon, shall I bring your skis?")

Middleton left us hurriedly to finish purchasing his field equipment. He stopped at a store in Piccadilly and bought a leather fur-lined coat and a fur cap. He bought a guide book to Norway.

"Just string along with me," Middleton told Guy Ramsay of the London *News-Chronicle*, "and you won't go wrong. We're going to Norway. I got it from the horse's mouth."

Middleton usually knows. He's one of the best newspapermen in London, one of the hardest workers in the business. Ramsay, who also knows his way about, replied, "I haven't the faintest idea where we're going, but I brought along some cotton shirts just in case we end up in a warm climate." The truth was he had only one wool shirt in his bag.

Some of the others, including Kluckhohn, had noticed a Russian dictionary on "Ike" Eisenhower's desk a few days before. They figured we were going to Russia.

I didn't know where we were going, didn't have the slightest idea. When you talk about invading a continent at six points that means covering a lot of territory. I felt sure we were going to hit Europe, hit it some place from Norway to Italy. Just what place I would be when we struck was something I couldn't figure out in my whirling thoughts. I just knew that it got pretty cold in Europe at this time of year, so I reckoned I'd better get some long woolies and plenty of heavy shirts. It wouldn't be fun sleeping in the open, maybe in the snow.

It was 4 P. M. The stores would be closing in another hour. I had a lot of things to buy. My uniform was still at the tailor's. I

had been told I could have it the following day. Perhaps it had been finished. If I was lucky, I thought. I was!

Norgaard and I hailed a cab in front of U. S. Army Headquarters. As I climbed into the cab, Beattie stepped over and said, "See you at the office a little later. You'll need some money. I'll have it waiting for you." Good old Ed. He was always in there pitching.

Norgaard and I hurried to the Army Quartermaster's Store. We found it overflowing. I noticed officers buying long underwear, heavy woolen socks, woolen shirts, fur-lined gloves. The store was doing a rush business in Arctic goods. Maybe it was to be Norway.

I grabbed a clerk, a sergeant from Brooklyn. "I'd like some of the heaviest underwear you've got." He brought out some British woolens. "This is something you can't buy anywhere else," he said. "How many?" I hesitated. "Make it three pairs, size thirty-six," I replied.

For an hour Norgaard and I went from store to store, piecing together our kit. We got boots, galoshes, woolen field trousers, sweaters, blanket-lined field jackets, Arctic field caps with ear muffs.

Finally we rolled into Fleet Street. I dumped Norgaard and half-a-cab of equipment at his flat in Fetter Lane, then hurried to my office in Bouverie Street. I breezed through the newsroom toward the accountant's office. Bill Dickinson looked up from the cable desk as I whipped past. "Going some place, Paris?" I wondered if he knew. "Just trying to catch Mac" (L. R. McLellan, U.P. accountant) "before he leaves. It's Wednesday and I'm broke, pal."

Mac gave me a wad of English pounds and a stack of good old American tens and twenties. He didn't ask any questions. Just took the order bearing Beattie's signature. "See you soon, Mac," I said, hurrying toward the door. "Sorry I can't buy you a drink tonight. Maybe we can make it tomorrow." Mac was grinning.

Back in Beattie's office I found Ed discussing a serious staff shortage with Joe Alex Morris, United Press foreign news editor, who had arrived in London the day before the Dieppe raid and had stayed on as an Allied offensive became more and more imminent. Joe was worried about replacements. McClure had picked five of our fellows to go on this show—Bill Disher, Phil Ault, Russell, Cunningham, and me. It left us with a skeleton staff. Joe couldn't even ask New York for more men. This might arouse suspicions.

"Well, fellow," I interrupted, "I guess this is really it. I'm all set except for packing. Any last-minute instructions? It may be one hell of a job communicating with you once I leave." I found out later just how tough it was communicating with the office, never sure that my messages got through. There were days on end when I wouldn't hear a word from the home office.

"Can't think of anything," Joe replied, "except don't take any unnecessary risks. We want you back all in one piece. Just remember that no story is better than its transmission."

Ed, big-hearted, lovable Ed, spoke up. "Remember what Joe said, don't take any unnecessary risks."

"Sure, sure," I said. "You won't catch me going off with the paratroops to capture Hitler. But what a honey of a story that would be!" It was a weak attempt at humor.

Ed let it pass. "I'm having dinner with some of the fellows from headquarters," he explained, "but what about getting together for a drink later? What you doing?"

"Swell. I'm having dinner with Miki at the Savoy. Maybe you and Joe can come by?"

"Right," agreed Beattie. "We'll see you there about nine."

I walked out of Ed's office and through the newsroom. I wondered when I'd see the place again. It might be a long, long time. I hated shoving off like this without telling the fellows so long. But that's how it had to be.

I had kept a cab waiting. I gave the driver my Kensington address. Dusk was just settling over the city. It was almost

black-out time. We passed an American soldier standing in front of the burned-out hulk that was Saint Clement's of the Danes, a Wren church that had felt the wrath of London's worst blitz, the night the Germans burned the "city." A queue, well sprinkled with Yanks, was forming in front of Aldwych Theatre for the last performance of "Watch on the Rhine." Along Piccadilly the ladies of the night were gathering, singling out the boys in uniform. London was just the same. Business was going on in the same old way. The old blind pianist in Leicester Square was hammering out "Over There." Little did London realize that the big show was getting under way. This was one time that nothing had leaked out.

As I rode along I tried to think of something, just anything, that would have indicated preparations for an invasion. Everything had been carried out with such precision and secrecy that not even German reconnaissance planes had been able to get near troop concentrations. There had been nothing unusual in recent days. Nobody had reported troop movements, ship concentrations. And here on the streets people were moving about as usual. In the pubs the men of the armed forces were tossing them down, perhaps their last drink for a long time. Many of them had had their orders for days but they had kept quiet. No careless talk.

I reached home, packed, called for Miki at her apartment. "I'm off on army maneuvers tomorrow morning," I explained. "I won't be able to get in touch with you. We're going to pretend we are really in battle and operate under those conditions. Ed will let you know when I communicate with the office. Now let's celebrate. What about the Savoy? I've already told Ed we would meet him and Joe there for a drink."

"Somehow I feel this is more than just maneuvers," Miki said. "How long will you be gone?"

"Nope. Only maneuvers. Honest Injun. We may be gone a couple weeks, maybe longer. I'll be traveling about in the British Isles, hopping from place to place." British Isles, hell, I thought.

It's Europe, fellow, and you won't be coming back until it's over. "They've been planning these maneuvers for some time and decided to get them over before winter starts in."

Miki accepted what I said, a bit doubtfully, I thought.

We walked into the Savoy dining room where the orchestra was playing, "When the Lights Go On Again." I never saw so many American officers. They were at practically every table. Lot of guys stepping out for the last time, getting a good meal before living on field rations. We ordered dinner. The wine steward came over. "Champagne," I said, "and make it the best you've got." Miki looked surprised. "Getting a bit extravagant in your old age, aren't you, Mister Parris?" she said. "Well, why not?"

The Savoy probably sold more champagne that night than any night in its history. There was a bottle at every American officer's table. Champagne at fourteen bucks a bottle.

Then we were out into the night, inside a cab and heading west across Trafalgar Square, finally pulling up at Ed's place in Berkeley Square. Ed was singing a parody on "A Nightingale Sang In Berkeley Square." . . . "there were six miscarriages at Claridges when a screaming bomb fell in Berkeley Square." Ed and Quent Reynolds had turned out the piece early one morning while the Jerries were over London.

Bill White joined us at Ed's. We had a couple of drinks. It was getting late. Time was running out for Bill and me. A few hours more and we would be on our way some place where there would be shooting. There was "one for the road" and we started to leave.

Bill turned to me as he went through the door. We were alone for the moment. He gripped my hand. "See you in Berlin, Bill." He grinned. "Okay, Bud. If you get there first grab a room in Hitler's chancellery." Then he was gone.

When I entered the living room Miki was getting into her coat. Joe Morris had his hat in his hand. Ed walked to the door with us. "Take care of yourself, fellow," he said. "You're a

lucky guy. I'd give a million to be going with you. I need a vacation," he added, for Miki's benefit.

We dropped Joe at his hotel. I wanted to walk awhile, so Miki and I gave up the cab and started through Hyde Park. There was a light mist falling. The night was still and brooding. A searchlight fingered the sky for a brief second and then snapped off. Big Ben was striking midnight.

Only eight more hours. Then the Yanks would start moving and I would be off on an assignment into . . . I wondered just where. Some place from Norway to Italy.

The words of a long-forgotten song ran through my head.

*The bells of Hell go ting-a-ling-a-ling,  
For you but not for me . . .*

## CHAPTER FOUR

WE ROLLED out of London in a lumbering old bus at mid-morning. There was no band, no cheering crowds to see us off. Only a corporal of the guard in khaki in front of Allied Operations Headquarters on the most Godforsaken square in all the city. The farewells and the last good-bys were hours behind us. It was another day and men from back home were off to do what they had come over here to do—fight. There were no tears, no grim, gray faces. Only laughter, good-natured cursing, a word here and there about the girl left behind. Somebody hummed, "I got spurs that jingle jangle." It all seemed like those football trips back home before Hitler and Mussolini and Tojo.

Here we were "marching as to war" in an old bus that should have been in the graveyard a long time ago. Here we were off on the "great adventure." In that other war they called it marching off "to make the world safe for democracy." This time we were off to fight for the Four Freedoms. This was the first mile on the road to Berlin and Rome.

Forty-five of us, mostly officers of the Twelfth U. S. Air Force Headquarters staff, were jammed into the bus. Norgaard and I were the only ones who didn't carry guns. We had only a typewriter and a hope and a prayer.

We rode for a couple of hours and came to a little out-of-the-way railway station on the outskirts of London, a little red-brick building tucked away on a side street, its platforms hidden by high wooden walls. It was really just a whistle-stop on the main line. The few civilians who saw us pile out of the bus didn't give us a second glance. They were used to seeing soldiers. But that many civilians scrambling out of a bus would have attracted their attention. It would have been unusual. We lugged our duffle bags into the station and onto the platform, a platform swarming with doughboys in full battle-kit. Most of them carried rifles slung over their shoulders. A few nursed sub-machine guns in the crooks of their arms. These were Jimmy Doolittle's air commandos, as tough a bunch of lads as you would find in Uncle Sam's or anybody's else army. They looked tough, all right, fellows who had never fired a shot in anger but who appeared capable of handling the guns they carried.

A six-foot-two sergeant with shoulders to match and a voice from the Texas Panhandle looked at his watch, then glanced up the tracks, blew his traffic-cop's whistle and shouted, "Fall in, hombres!" There was a scramble, a shuffle of heavily shod feet, and they fell in, lined up three-deep a hundred yards along the platform. The sergeant bawled, "AT-t-e-n-SHUN!" The train rolled into the station and came to a churning halt.

The sergeant was shouting again. "Officers in the first three cars. The rest of you hombres pile in where you can. But no pushing. Understand?"

We tossed our kits into the first compartment of the front carriage and piled in. I found a seat by Captain Max Boyd, a former Washington newspaperman, who had been assigned to the Twelfth Air Force as public relations officer and nursemaid to us correspondents.

As the train lurched on the take-off somebody stuck his head inside the compartment and yelled, "This is it, fellows!" A bit startled, I looked up. I saw a man with a gold leaf on his shoulder and a big, friendly smile spreading across his wind-tanned face. That was my introduction to Major James H. Goddard, who had left an insurance business and a family back in Boston. Goddard plopped down across from us. Boyd told me Goddard was attached to G-2, a fellow with plenty on the ball and an old campaigner; he had been in France with the A.E.F. in '17.

"You boys expect to knock off any Germans with those things?" Goddard asked, nodding toward our typewriters.

"I'd feel better if it was one of those Chicago models," I said, making talk.

"Mean to tell me you fellows haven't got a gun? Some way to go to war. I'll have to scour one up for you."

Boyd thought he was serious. "But, Major," he said, "they aren't allowed to carry guns. There's some sort of international rule prohibiting correspondents from carrying guns."

"You don't say!" Goddard exclaimed, winking. "What do you know about that. I surely don't envy you fellows. I'm afraid I'd damn well forget that little rule if I got caught in the thick of things. I'd just pick up the first shooting iron I could lay my hands on and start pulling the trigger. You don't think the Germans are going to respect that green arm band you're wearing? Not much, I don't think. Well, glad to have known you fellows."

Another officer with gold leaves on his shoulders who had been dozing, stirred, grinned and said to Goddard, "Don't kid the boys too much, Jim. After all, they're too young to die." Boyd interrupted, "Major, I want you to know Parris of the United Press. John, this is Major Don Coster." Coster? The name rang a bell somewhere in the back of my mind.

"Major," I asked, "were you in France when the Germans came in?"

"Why, yes," he replied. "What made you ask? I was with

the American Volunteer Ambulance Corps and was captured when the Germans took Paris."

Then I remembered. I had been on the cable desk in our New York office one night when a story came through that Don Coster of 38 Central Park, South, New York, had driven an ambulance with wounded soldiers through a blistering German artillery barrage from the front lines into Paris just a few hours ahead of the Nazis. They had called him a hero. The Germans captured him and he was interned, finally released.

When the Japs bombed Pearl Harbor, Coster was sitting behind a desk in his advertising agency in Montreal. He came home immediately, offered his services to his country. He was a naval reserve officer and was just getting his commission when word came through for him to report to the State Department. One of Mr. Hull's assistants told Coster he was too valuable just at that moment to go into the navy. The State Department had a little job for him at Casablanca. He knew French like a Frenchman and knew the French people. Just the man they had been looking for, they said. So Coster went to Casablanca as a vice consul, but his job was intelligence.

Coster was one of the few who had known since June where the Second Front was to be opened. He had been instrumental in laying the groundwork, establishing an underground front, a fifth column to help the boys in khaki when they landed. Later when I found out where we were going and had been told in detail about the operation, Coster disclosed the most amazing story of underground work in American history, a job that equaled anything the Germans had ever accomplished.

"Do you know where you are going?" Coster asked.

"No," I replied. "I only know that this is to be the Second Front. I was told not to ask any questions, that I would be told in due time."

"That's right," Goddard spoke up. "It's our job, Don, to set him right. We'll tell you all about it in a few days. Just have

patience. I'm damned surprised you haven't been pumping everybody on this train already. I wouldn't have believed a newspaperman could have seemed so disinterested."

"After all," I replied, "I don't want to be court-martialed before I even get out of Britain. I had my orders. But I'm burning up with curiosity."

The train rolled through the gray morning and into a grayer afternoon. On and on we rolled, always southwest, always toward the coast. The rain came down and peppered the windows. Most of us dozed in the stuffy car. And then in late afternoon we stopped in the outskirts of an English town where barrage balloons dotted the leaden sky. The windows of the carriage were water-streaked and foggy. I rubbed away a patch of fog and peered into the grayness. There were a lot of warehouses. A smoke stack here and there, rising in the distance. I looked for some sign to identify the town, but there was none. Long ago when England feared invasion all the road signs and town names had been removed. We were rolling again, slowly through the railway yards, turning off on a spur line. And then I saw the masts of ships riding above the screen of gray buildings. We were somewhere on the English coast. But where? Maybe we were moving out to sea tonight. This thought contradicted the impression Phillips and McClure had given that we were to be in the British Isles for a couple weeks.

Finally the train halted. We were on a quay siding. A big transport ship, huge and ugly, was tied up just back of the warehouse beyond the train. Then I saw khaki lines moving along the platform.

Goddard, rousing out of a light sleep, said, "This is it, fellows. I can smell the salt air. This is as far as we go on this baby. There's your new home." He pointed to the transport.

We climbed down from the train, gathered our luggage and walked into the big warehouse where a British army officer sat at a little table calling out names. When he yelled, "Parris," I stepped forward and took the little card he held out. It was my

cabin number. I walked up the gangplank and into the great, gray hulk that had been a cruise vessel on the pre-war Alexandria run. She was to be my home for eighteen days.

I dumped my gear in my cabin. There were eight bunks. Once there had been only two bunks in this cabin. I went back up on deck. I stood by the rail and watched another trainload of doughboys come aboard. A cold rain was sweeping in from the sea. Cranes creaked and groaned, swinging the last equipment and supplies up and down into the holds.

A lieutenant from Mississippi came up and leaned over the rail beside me. "We're not wasting much time," he said. "I hear we get out of here just after midnight."

Boyd came up. "You got any last-minute messages to post?" he asked. "There's a post going off at six o'clock. You can't tell anybody you're leaving the country or where you are."

"Thanks, Max," I said. "I'll just drop the folks a line. I didn't have a chance to write last night." I moved down to the officers' lounge and knocked out a couple of notes, one to the folks and another to Miki.

We sailed at midnight.

When I awoke at 6 A. M., a grinning British Indian whom we dubbed "Joe" was serving tea. I looked around the cabin and for the first time saw my seven cabin mates. Joe was having trouble waking the kid in upper-A. "Christ!" the kid was saying, "what's the idea of waking a guy in the middle of the night? We're not sinking, are we?" Joe motioned to the tea. "What?" the kid exploded. "Just for tea? Well, I'll be damned! Ain't this some war!" Captain Anthony Coukle, lately of Atlanta, Georgia, waved Joe away and went back to sleep.

I tumbled out of my bunk, dressed and went up top. As I stepped out on deck the sunlight blinded me. When my sight had returned I was stunned by what I saw around me.

There were ships everywhere. I counted transports and freight ships, destroyers, cruisers, corvettes, and the long, high, boxlike

shapes of aircraft carriers. There were still more ships, so close together it was quite impossible to count them. They just ran together.

A submarine moved along the surface across our bow and a giant white Catalina flying boat circled overhead. On the broad flight deck of the nearest carrier, some Spitfires were warming up, their motors purring softly in the silence of this Sunday morning.

I reckoned this was one of the marshalling points. How many more there were I didn't have the faintest idea.

Sleek, little motor boats flying the Union Jack shuttled about the harbor, from one ship to another, churning up white foam.

"A pretty sight," said a voice behind me, "but quite a target for Jerry." Without turning, I recognized the owner of the voice. It was Goddard. He moved to the rail beside me. "This is really something, eh, kid?" He shook his head as if what he saw was a dream.

"What about all those ships the Germans have been sinking over their radio?" I said. "Looks like we've still got a few."

"This is only a part of our force," Goddard explained. "Wait until we make rendezvous. You'll really see a sight for sore eyes."

Other men in khaki joined us. Talking along the deck suddenly became louder and more enthusiastic. Somebody had spotted more ships moving into the harbor from the south. There was another aircraft carrier. She was a giant and wore the paint of the Mediterranean fleet. We watched her slice the water.

Goddard had out his binoculars. "Here, take a look," he offered. I focused the glasses on the incoming vessels. There must have been thirty. I really couldn't count them. I swept their decks and moved the glasses as far to the right and as far to the left as I could. My eyes hesitated on every one. I saw hundreds of men on the decks of these ships. Invasion barges, light gray and bright in the sun, swung from the sides of the transports.

"Quite an impressive sight," I said. "Looks like a lot of troops."

"Yep," Goddard replied. "There's thousands of fighting men on these ships. There's thousands packed below decks that you can't even see."

I thought I'd take a turn around and see what the boys were doing, try to gauge their spirits. I suggested it to Goddard. He joined me.

Our ship had once been a handsome boat. Her decks were wide and the white-painted lines where tourists once had played shuffle-board were practically gone. When war broke out she was converted into a troop-carrier. Her beautiful innards had been ripped out to make room for more bunks. Her deck chairs were missing now. Her portholes had been blacked out and the windows of the lounges boarded up. She had been stripped for war.

We found things quiet. A group of Negro soldiers were sprawled on the promenade deck, just under the windows of the library. They had a deck of cards, and a black boy from the South was dealing. There wasn't a dime in sight. The troop commander had ordered no gambling. They were playing "set-back." A few others were dozing. A couple stood at the rail, looking out to sea. A Negro sergeant was oiling his pistol.

Forward we found boys from Brooklyn and Dallas and Chicago and Salt Lake City sitting on the deck, backs to the wall. They were just talking. Most of the fellows didn't seem to know what to do with themselves.

In the forward lounge, stripped of its once-luxurious furnishings, it was like a morgue. A lieutenant with wings on his chest sat in one corner making an entry in his diary. Across from him a major was reading a Peter Chaney detective novel. Two others were playing gin-rummy.

The bar, a little semicircular slab of polished mahogany, was closed. There was a notice over the bar which read, "No Drinks

Will Be Served Aboard This Ship." In smaller letters, just beneath, it said cigarettes and chocolate would be sold twice daily—11 A. M. and 6 P. M.

"That's a helluva note!" Goddard exclaimed. "No whiskey. Can you beat it?"

We walked out and down the corridor to the enlisted men's quarters. We climbed down a ladder into a hot, smelly hold. There were dozens of bunks along the walls. In the center was a long table. This was where the enlisted men lived—ate, slept, and played.

God, what a place, I thought. These poor devils were going to war the hard way. It didn't seem too good for morale. I knew it must be hot down here at night when the hatches were closed.

Goddard and I stuck around until lunchtime. The food was thrown at them. And what food! Watery salmon and brussels sprouts. I noticed that some of the fellows just dabbled with their food. Some of them just took a couple of bites, got up and went out. I didn't like this. These men were fighting men and they needed good food.

"What's the reason for this, Major?" I asked Goddard when we had gone above deck. He shook his head. "Beats me," he finally said. "It's British rations, you know. This is a British ship and we pay so much per man. The feeding is left up to the British. I can't believe this will last."

We walked into the officers' dining room. I picked up the menu. It read: "Soup Mulligatawny. Fillets of Lamb, Milanaise. Welsh Rarebit. COLD—Roast Beef . . . Melton Mowbray Pie . . . Lettuce Salad. Vegetables—Saute Potatoes. Sweet—Blancmange with Jam Sauce . . . Cheese . . . Biscuits . . . Coffee." I looked across the table at Goddard. I had lost my appetite and so had he.

Goddard turned to Clint Frank, aide to Jimmy Doolittle, and told him what we had seen down in the enlisted men's mess. "It's a damn shame," said Goddard. "Something should be done

about it. I won't be able to eat another meal here until something is done."

"Something will be done," Frank said. "I'll get to work on it right away."

I finished and went out on deck, alone. I walked over to where a group of enlisted men had gathered. I knew a couple of them. They recognized me but kept right on talking. "It ain't fit for a dog," said one. "We feed our hogs better than that," said another.

A young private, a graduate of Yale who had been a promising young lawyer back in New York until the draft got him, was sitting over in the corner, under a stairway. He looked pretty lonely and pretty sick. I went over and sat down and tried to make howdy. "I'm not one to grumble," he said, "but I can't go on eating this food and living holed-up down there." I didn't know what to say. There was nothing I could do. "I think they are going to do something about it," I said. He looked up as if to say, "Are you kidding?" But he only said, "I hope so."

I went looking for Frank. I found him coming from the troop commander's office. "Make any headway, Clint?" He shook his head. "I don't know," he said. "The Old Man promised to do something about it. I just hope he does. These fellows can't go on like this, not when they're supposed to fight. It isn't fighting food. It would be tough enough on ordinary people. I went down to see for myself. I could hardly believe it."

We moved out to sea at midnight. Orders had gone through the ship that we were to sleep in our clothes from here on out. Our life jackets were to be carried with us wherever we went in the ship. There would be life-boat drill twice daily. No smoking above decks. And no roaming the decks after blackout unless we had permission.

The days were long now and time was heavy on our hands. I still didn't know where we were going, but I had picked up a few hints. I knew it wasn't Europe. Could it be Dakar? My cabin

mates all knew where we were going, with the exception of Norgaard. I noticed Boyd had a summer uniform hanging in his locker. I knew we weren't going to Norway or France or Holland. I began to wish I had brought along my French-English dictionary, so I could brush up on my French.

Our day began at 6 A. M. when Joe brought in tea. Then there was a scramble for the bathroom to shave. We had been warned not to take tub-baths now that we were at sea. A fellow wouldn't have much chance if the ship was torpedoed while in the tub. Some of them go down pretty fast. Breakfast was at 8 A. M. Boat drill at 10:30 A. M. There weren't enough boats to go around. I heard one colonel tell his men that should we have to abandon ship and there was any pushing he would shoot the men responsible. From ten-thirty until lunch we walked the decks, lay out in the sun, played gin-rummy, or just "fanned the breeze." Three o'clock there were setting-up exercises and then boat drill again. Between this time and dinner there was pistol practice and the anti-aircraft gun crews went through their paces. Dinner and then to the library to read or down to the cabin to play poker.

Frank and some of the fellows had pulled off the miracle. The grumbling from the enlisted men's quarters had died to a whisper. The food was better and there was more of it. The men were happier.

The enlisted men gathered on the promenade decks now and laughed and talked and wrestled. Among themselves they tried to figure out where we were going. One rumor spread through the ship that we were going home. Some of the men believed it, especially the Negroes who were homesick for sunshine and their own folks.

I wondered when I would be told what our job in this big operation was. We had been at sea eight days, "sailing all over the Atlantic," as one lieutenant put it. We had changed course numerous times, maneuvering like a Notre Dame football team going through signals.

On this eighth day, Thursday, October twenty-ninth, Goddard sent for me. I found him and Coster in their cabin. "Make yourself at home and tarry awhile," Goddard invited. I plopped down on a bunk. "Guess you're getting pretty anxious to know where you're going," he said. I nodded my head. "Well, kid, this is it." He grinned. "We're headed for French North Africa. Does that surprise you?"

"Not much," I replied, explaining I had picked up enough conversation in the lounge and dining room to get a general idea.

"It may be easy or it may be tough as hell," Goddard added. "Coster seems to think it will be easy. I don't know. I'm reserving my opinion for the moment. People are hard to figure out. Those you think won't fight, fight like hell and those you figure will fight sometimes don't. But you're going to have something to write about. You can bet your bottom dollar on that. We've got a staff meeting now, but we'll meet you at three o'clock on the officers' deck and give you the whole story."

"Okay," I said, getting up. "See you at three."

## CHAPTER FIVE

THE young French general was badly wounded. Blood seeped into the soil of Flanders Field. He had been left for dead there on the plains near Charleroi. The French bayonet attack he was leading had failed.

It was 1914.

The young redhaired general lay there on the ground more dead than alive. In the fading twilight he vaguely heard voices. German voices. He slowly opened his eyes. He tried to speak. The figure in the spiked helmet towering over him was only a blur.

"*Mein Gott!*" the German exclaimed. "He's alive. Fetch a stretcher." Two soldiers hurried off to obey the order.

They lifted the young general gently onto the canvas stretcher. An ambulance carried him to a dressing station. Then to a hospital far behind the lines. Finally, he went to a prison camp.

One night the young general escaped.

He made his way to Holland, aided by his fluent German, variously disguised as a butcher, stableboy, coal man, and magician in a traveling circus.

Nurse Edith Cavell helped him escape to England.

In 1915 he was back with the French Fifth Army.

His name: Henri Honoré Giraud.

The lonely old woodchopper of Doorn laid aside his axe and waited for death in his Dutch sanctuary. His turned-up mustaches and closely clipped hair were white now and mold was gathering on his plumed, spiked helmet in the castle cellar.

The "little corporal" was in the saddle now and the German hordes of gray once again were sweeping over the battle-scarred land.

It was May, 1940.

The French were fighting a losing battle. The notorious collapse of General André Georges Corap's Ninth Army Command was already under way.

General Henri Honoré Giraud, sixty-three but still a good soldier, was rushed into the breach at Sedan.

But it was too late.

General Giraud went from one window to the other in the little house there above Sedan. Everywhere he saw German tanks. He wrote out a brief message and handed it to the radio operator.

"Send that to general staff headquarters," he said.

The French radio operator took the message and began tapping out these words:

"Headquarters surrounded by one hundred tanks. Am destroying them."

And then the radio went silent.

The Germans took General Giraud prisoner.

With many other high French officers he was imprisoned in Saxony's grim, moated Koenigstein Fortress on a mountainside seven hundred and fifty feet above the Elbe.

Henri Honoré Giraud became the Nazis' No. 1 French war prisoner. He was granted certain privileges that his friends didn't enjoy. He was an old man and the Nazis didn't worry about his trying to escape. They didn't know the old general.

Somehow he managed to obtain German maps and timetables. From gift boxes he assembled a suit of civilian clothes. His plan of escape was already clear in his mind.

When the general and his friends were given airings in near-by fields they casually picked strands of hemp. His wife sent him lengths of thread in gift packages. With these he began weaving a rope, working on it at night, winding it about his body to keep the guards from discovering it when they searched his cell.

One night he let himself down on the rope. It was too short. He climbed up again, wove some more.

This time he made sure the rope was long enough. He shaved his fine, luxurious mustache. He took powdered brick and rubbed it into his face to alter his complexion. He rubbed it into his hair until all traces of gray were gone.

Then he let himself down all sixty feet to the moat.

Posing as a Swiss traveling salesman, he spent eleven days on obscure roads and railroads leading to Switzerland.

Fighting French agents learned of his escape. When he appeared on the Swiss-French frontier, a mysterious French woman met him. She had been given the task of leading him through Occupied France to Vichy.

General Giraud again changed his disguise. He became an old woman. The mysterious French woman posed as his daughter. It was as mother and daughter that they traveled. Whenever any one asked the "old lady" a question, it was always the "daughter" who answered.

Many Nazi officials actually spoke to Giraud—but they didn't realize it.

Then he arrived in Vichy.

Marshal Pétain embraced him.

"What can I do to help France?" was the general's first question.

The old man of Vichy gave him a paper to sign, which among other things pledged him never to take up arms against Germany.

Henri Honoré Giraud balked.

Swarthy, evil-lipped, little Pierre Laval spoke to Giraud.

"You could do France a mighty service," he slyly suggested, "by offering to return to prison in exchange for four hundred thousand married French war prisoners. I am sure it can be arranged."

General Giraud liked the idea. He would be doing something for France.

"I shall get in touch with the German occupation authorities," Laval told him.

Laval and Giraud met the Nazi occupation authorities. Giraud was told if he would give himself up immediately arrangements would be made to free the French prisoners. Giraud blew up.

"I would trust no Nazi word on anything," he said. "Once you have me again you will do nothing toward releasing those men."

The negotiations bogged down. Pétain refused to turn Giraud over to the Germans. Finally, the general promised the Nazis he would not interfere in Vichy-German affairs. He was in poor health anyway.

He went to Lyons to live with a sister.

The Nazis forgot about Henri Honoré Giraud.

For three days the British submarine had been hovering off the French Mediterranean coast, submerging by day, surfacing at night.

"It will be dark soon," said the British naval lieutenant, look-

ing at his watch. "We'll have another try. Maybe luck will be with us tonight."

"I hope so," said the American naval captain, wondering if he was going to be able to carry out his mission after all. "Time is getting short, you know."

Lieutenant N. L. A. Jewell looked up at the little calendar hanging there above his desk. The date stared down at him. November 5, 1942. "Yes," he said, "time is getting short."

Captain Jerauld Wright fished into his pocket and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He offered the lieutenant one, then took one himself. "Our convoys," he said, "will be going through the Straits tonight."

The black hulk broke surface and then laid a course toward the Gulf of Lions. A waning moon hung in the sky, but the night was dark enough for their purpose and the sea was moderately smooth.

The American captain and the British lieutenant stepped out on deck.

"See anything?" Wright asked.

Jewell swept the French shore with his night glasses. Slowly, slowly, he scanned the coast. There was only blackness. "Nothing yet," he said.

The submarine crept onward guided only by the dim loom of the black shoreline.

Wright placed his night glasses to his eyes. A faint light blinked. "There," Wright pointed. "There just to the left of that point."

"I see it now," said Jewell.

The two officers went below.

Jewell shouted an order into the microphone and the submarine submerged.

At ten fathoms the submarine slid toward the French harbor. They were only a little way off shore when the submarine broke surface again.

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Again there was a signal from shore. A garbled blinker. Wright read the flashes.

"W-a-i-t o-n-e h-o-u-r."

He looked at the illuminated face of his watch. Just a little after nine. The shore of France was black and silent. There was only the muffled roar of the surf lapping the beach.

Five minutes passed. The light began blinking again.

"E-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g g-o-i-n-g a-c-c-o-r-d-i-n-g t-o s-c-h-e-d-u-l-e."

Wright waited tensely. My God, they would be in a tight spot if a searchlight suddenly snapped on and began probing the blackness. Might even be gunfire. These thoughts ran through his head.

And then he saw a dark shape gliding out from the darker shore. It drew closer, closer. Wright stared into the blackness. The black shape began to take on form. It was a rowboat.

Five, ten minutes passed. The rowboat pulled alongside the submarine. The little boat tossed in the rising seas.

A half dozen British tars grabbed the side of the rowboat, tried to make it fast. As the little boat bobbed up and down, a tall, old man in civilian clothes stepped onto the deck of the submarine. As his feet hit the deck, the submarine gave a heave. He lost his footing and fell sprawling into the sea. Hands reached down and pulled him back quickly. He was soaked but uninjured.

Three other men came aboard. One was the old man's son.

The British tars set the rowboat adrift.

The old man went below, followed by Wright and Jewell and the others.

Wright was smiling. So far so good.

Jewell ordered the engineer to put the submarine down to ten fathoms and head for the open sea.

The radio operator brought Jewell a message. He handed it to Wright.

"Another ticklish job," Wright said. "We rendezvous with a

plane at eleven-thirty tomorrow morning." He turned to the old man. "You'd better get some sleep, General."

Throughout the night they moved, then came dawn and they surfaced. The sun came up. There were a few clouds in the sky.

"I'd like this better if it was overcast," said Wright.

At 11:30 A. M. to the dot a plane circled once over the submarine and then swooped down. It landed near the submarine.

British tars came out on deck with collapsible boats. The old general and his companions emerged from the conning tower. They stepped over to where the boats bobbed in the water.

The drone of a plane's motor sounded high in the sky. Wright looked up. There it was, about eight thousand feet.

"Get below and prepare for crash dive," Jewell ordered.

The plane circled, never changing altitude. After forty minutes it winged off toward the northeast.

Once again the old general and his companions came from below. This time they stepped into the little rubber boats. Wright was with them. They paddled over to the plane and climbed aboard.

The pilot gave his motors the gun and the big ship skimmed over the water and then rose into the air. It headed west toward Gibraltar.

The plane rounded the southern point of the Rock.

"I'm coming in for a landing," the pilot said over his radio.

"Okay," answered a voice. "Bring her in."

The big ship swept low over the bay and then churned up water. The pilot nursed her into the dock.

General Dwight Eisenhower greeted the old man when he stepped ashore.

"Congratulations," he said. "Glad to have you with us, sir."

The old man's shoulders straightened. He saluted. Then smiled.

General Henri Honoré Giraud had joined the Allies to save his beloved France.

The afternoon sun spun golden mists over Gibraltar.  
It was November seventh.

## CHAPTER SIX

GODDARD met me at three on the officers' deck.

"Sorry," he apologized, "but we'll have to cancel that little conference. I've got to go below and break the news to the enlisted men. Want to come along?"

We went below. The men were crowded into the hold. They were bantering and laughing. They became quiet as Goddard began speaking.

"This is it," Goddard said. "We're heading for North Africa. There may be some shooting but I know you men are prepared to handle the situation."

Suddenly the mystery of the journey was clear. The men knew where they were going.

"We'll take care of that," said a big fellow from Jersey. "We ain't a bunch of sissies. We can dish it out. They didn't give us these guns for nothing."

"All right, boys," Goddard said. "Just bear with me for a little while. Your present journey will be taking you to new parts of the world where the people, their customs and manner of living, and the geography of the country will be, for the majority of us, completely strange and foreign. Furthermore, our welcome by the inhabitants of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia is not certain at this time."

The men sat silent, listening. They cast glances at their buddies.

"You will, of course, want to know and respect the people in whose country we are stationed," Goddard continued. "They will judge us by our conduct as individuals. You are, in a very real sense, an ambassador of our country."

"On many occasions this question will be asked you by the inhabitants: Why have you come? The answer is straightforward and simple. We have come to drive out the common enemy.

"We seek no territory or material gains. We want to keep them as friends. We have come to help them, not to oppress them.

"British troops, ships, and planes are backing us up. We are working and fighting together in a United Nations offensive.

"It was the wish of the President that the first blow in this assault should be primarily American. The name of the United States will stand for freedom to millions of Frenchmen, as it does to all the people of Europe. It was the President's request that we should lead off in this operation in order to make the issues as clear as possible. We Americans have come from afar to hit the common enemy, and we are determined to do our fullest share to liberate the victims of oppression.

"You are soldiers trained for modern war, and you know a lot about Nazi propaganda. Nothing would be more to Hitler's advantage than to split Americans and British. We know that our interests and those of the British are the same. At bottom we want the same things, and we are fighting together to get them. We must not let ourselves be confused about this by any of the enemy's propaganda tricks.

"You will be landing," Goddard explained, "on the shores of a country whose people are our traditional friends. We are not after the conquest of territory, but we are out to destroy our enemy. This operation has been decided on as the quickest way to strike at one of the enemy's vulnerable spots, and millions of Frenchmen are going to see that point, no matter what their nazified government tries to tell them. Maybe you don't know what has been happening to the French people, what they have been thinking and doing these last two and a half years. You ought to know some of the story, so here it is briefly.

"In France itself, especially in the Occupied Zone, the people

have been putting up a better fight against the Nazis than their leaders succeeded in putting up. Their spirits were pretty low in the early days after the disaster, and there wasn't much they could do. But, when we came into this war and when they learned how the United Nations' strength was rising, the hopes of the French shot upward, first slowly, then by leaps and bounds. The French waited for us, and worked for us. They also listened to us, to our radio programs, risking their lives to hear a few words from New York, Cincinnati, Schenectady, Boston, or London. They read leaflets dropped by airplanes, and they sent out word that they had never stopped thinking of themselves as our allies.

"And, ever since 1940, many Frenchmen have continued to fight openly on our side, in the armed ranks of the United Nations. They and their brothers at home keeping up the silent and dangerous struggle against terrorism, have wanted the same thing: to regain freedom and to pay back the Nazis for France's defeat and humiliation.

"Don't forget these facts. Don't forget that an overwhelming majority of Frenchmen have always been on our side, and are still on our side."

Goddard then explained the geography of the country, going into great detail.

"The terrain of Algeria and French Morocco," he said, "is generally of the same description. It consists of a relatively narrow coastal strip, in rear of which rise three mountain chains, which in general parallel the coastal outline. Between these ranges in certain localities you will find agricultural or grazing lands. Large sections of these three mountain ranges are barren, rocky and practically inaccessible. In rear of the innermost of these ranges lies the Sahara Desert.

"The climate varies greatly depending on your location. Along the coast the summers are oppressive due to humidity. In winter the coastal areas have a climate very similar to that of

early fall in the United States. Little rainfall is experienced along the coast.

"In the mountain areas, the climate is mild in summer; the days may be hot but the nights are cold. Winter in the mountains is in general cold with light north winds and occasional snow. Rain is infrequent in these areas.

"During the entire year a strong north wind called the sirocco may sweep the country. The wind is dry and hot, usually carries fine sand and dust and is very trying to humans. In addition, dust storms are fairly frequent during the summer and may occur during the winter.

"Mirage is of fairly frequent occurrence. It generally occurs early in the morning. These mirages are apt to be very confusing to troops not used to them, for as a result of images, ranges are hard to estimate and objects take on a deceptive appearance."

Next Goddard took up the French territories in North Africa, one by one, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, telling something of its people and its history. And then he explained hygiene.

"All of North and Northwest Africa," he said, "is a breeding ground for disease. The majority of these diseases are ones with which we are not, as individuals, familiar, since they do not occur at home. The standards of civilian hygiene in this area are low and the risks of infection correspondingly high. Here are some simple rules which must be followed if you are to remain healthy. Learn these rules and follow them.

"During the hot weather the chief dangers are: sunstroke and heatstroke; intestinal diseases such as cholera, typhoid fever, dysentery, bilharzia.

"Always wear your sun helmet from sunrise to sunset unless you are in a house with a good roof. See that your clothing and equipment fits properly, and permits as much evaporation of sweat from the skin as possible. Avoid constipation.

"During the cold weather—that's the period you're now entering—some of the previously mentioned diseases disappear

but others take their place such as pneumonia, influenza, and common cold. There are also insect-borne diseases, such as plague, relapsing fever, typhus, and other diseases spread by lice, fleas, ticks.

"Wear woolen O.D. instead of khaki. Keep the stomach well protected and covered at night while lying down. Avoid native huts and sleeping accommodations, owing to the danger of infected rats, fleas, ticks. Learn to recognize the more common types of vermin and how to deal with them on your body and clothing. You will be supplied with insect-killing powder. Use it by sprinkling and rubbing it into the seams of underclothing.

"Venereal diseases, especially syphilis, are rife among all prostitutes. Grave risks accompany sexual intercourse, and native women are to be avoided."

The men were listening attentively. There hadn't been a peep out of them.

"And now," said Goddard, "something about the native population. In North Africa you will meet the descendants of races and empires which were making history at the dawn of organized life, thousands of years ago. Some of the people are Arabs, some Negroes, some of other origins.

"Most of them will seem to be, and are, very different from people at home. But don't make any mistakes about them, and don't judge by external appearances which may confuse you.

"They are not backward, uneducated people. They were great, and created rich cultures long before Columbus discovered America.

"Many of the tribes of Morocco and Algeria can look back with pride to the great Arab Empire which attained immense power when Europe was still struggling through the dark ages.

"Their dress, their customs, their habits may seem strange and peculiar to you, but keep in mind that they are in no sense inferior to you or the Europeans, that they have made great contributions to civilization.

"The French have always understood how to deal with the

inhabitants of North Africa. They have never treated them as inferiors. They have never followed the Nazi racial doctrine which says that all races are inferior to the one self-appointed German Master Race. It is up to you, as representatives of America, to observe and respect the relations which have grown up between the French and the people of North Africa under their rule. It's up to you to remember that these North Africans are in their own home, and that you are in their home. Act toward them as you would expect them to act toward you if they came to America on the same kind of mission as yours.

"It may not be easy. You may bring some old prejudices with you, prejudices of race or color or creed. If so, you must remember that it's your first duty to subordinate them to the good of your country. You must take the attitude that giving way to such prejudices would amount literally to shooting Americans in the back.

"That's not an overstatement. Your behavior toward the population is as important as your bravery under fire. If you do the wrong thing, you are helping the enemy. If you act in an unfriendly or undignified manner, you will be fighting against our side. A brawl in a cafe, or a street incident, would give the Nazis just the kind of ammunition they want. It would damage our cause and help create confusion in the Near and Middle East. It would, in effect, amount to exposing the lives of your friends and comrades to entirely unnecessary risks.

"The immense majority of the inhabitants of these territories are Moslems, followers of the prophet Mohammed. Their racial origins may differ; their dialects, customs, and standards of living may vary greatly from region to region; but they have in common the great religious and cultural traditions of Islam.

"Their mosques and other places of worship are sacred to them. A few mosques may permit your inspection, but it is much better to be on the safe side and stay out of all their holy places. Before you go sightseeing, make sure that you know what the regulations are.

"However strange their ideas may seem to you, it is not up to you, when you are in their country, to do or say anything to interfere with customs Arabs have observed and respected for over a thousand years."

Goddard paused, looked over his audience.

"Now here is something," he said, "I want you to listen well to. There is no Arab custom which must be respected more completely than their attitude toward women. The differences between peaceful and friendly relations with the natives on the one hand, and serious difficulty on the other, may depend on whether or not every single one of us understands and respects the very special outlook the Moslems have toward women.

"You must not talk to Moslem women. Never. Under no circumstances. The most innocent word addressed to a Moslem woman is considered an insult, and is bitterly resented by all Moslem men. If an Arab asks you to his house, the women in the house are confined to their quarters. If anything is said or done by you which would make Moslem men feel you have shown disrespect for their women, there will be no limit to their righteous indignation.

"Regarding Moslem women, you must put aside all your own preconceived notions and ideas. You must remember that your conduct in this matter may decide the fate of the campaign.

"Remember this at all times. It is a most serious warning.

"Now," said Goddard, "here are some important do's and don'ts. Don't enter mosques. Never smoke or spit in front of a mosque. If you come near a mosque, keep moving and don't loiter. Keep silent when Moslems are praying and don't stare. Discuss something else, never religion or women with Moslems. Avoid offering opinions on internal policies. Shake hands with Arabs; otherwise don't touch them or slap them on the back. Remember that the Arabs are a modest people and avoid any exposure of the body in their presence. Start eating only after your host has begun. Eat with your right hand—never with your left, even if you are a southpaw. Always break bread with your fin-

gers—never cut it. Bread to the Moslems is holy. Don't throw scraps of it about or let it fall on the ground. Leave some food in the bowl—what you leave goes to the women and children. Eat only part of the first course—there may be four or five more coming. Don't give Moslems food containing pork, bacon or lard, or cooked in pork products. Don't eat pork or pork products in front of Moslems. Be pleasant if Moslems refuse to eat meat which you offer; they may consider it religiously unclean. Don't give Moslems alcoholic drinks. Drink liquor somewhere else—never in the presence of Moslems. Knock before entering a house. If a woman answers, wait until she has had time to retire. Follow the rule of your host. If he takes off his shoes on entering the house, do the same. If you are required to sit on the floor in an Arab house or tent, cross your legs while doing so. When visiting, don't overstay your welcome. The third glass of tea or coffee is the signal to leave unless you are quartered there. Don't bring a dog into the house. Don't kill snakes and birds. Some Arabs believe the souls of departed chieftains reside in them. Be kind to beggars. They are mostly honest unfortunates. Give them some small change occasionally. When you see grown men walking hand in hand, ignore it. They are not 'queer.' Talk Arabic if you can to the people. No matter how badly you do it, they like it. Shake hands on meeting and leaving. On meeting an Arab, be sure to inquire after his health. If you wish to give someone a present, make it sweets or cigarettes."

It was getting hot there in the enlisted men's quarters and a few of them seemed to be getting restless.

"Finally," said Goddard, "a word to the wise. The whole of North Africa has been flooded, in the last two years, with Axis agents who will be eager to obtain all information possible about our plans, our strength, our troops dispositions; in fact, any type of information. A clever agent may get the complete plan by piecing together small scraps of conversations. Remember, silence will save your life and the lives of your fellow soldiers, so don't talk or let your buddies talk about military affairs."

We climbed out of the hold, Goddard wiping the sweat from his face. "Quite a textbook," I said. "That sort of puts the lid on the conquest of those gals out of *The Arabian Nights*." Goddard grinned. "It's just as well," he replied. "Wait until you get a look. The boys may be a bit disappointed now, but when they get there and have a look for themselves they'll want to murder a few fiction writers."

We stopped by Goddard's cabin to pick up a brief case. He handed me a roll of maps, explaining, "I'm taking you along to an officers' meeting. This is to be the last big pow-wow before we go ashore. You'll hear the whole thing explained, what each man is to do and where he will be assigned. It's a sort of a pep talk, too."

Clint Frank joined us. We made our way through the long, now empty corridors to the officers' mess which was packed and jammed and thick with cigarette smoke. About two hundred and fifty officers, from second lieutenants to colonels, sat around the long dining tables. Some of the fellows sat on the floor, others on the stairs. Maps were spread out on every table.

I looked around for a spot to light. Colonel Miller caught my eye, motioned me to come sit by him. "Better sit here and listen well," he warned. "I may be able to fix it for you to go ashore with me before the landing parties." Miller was a bantam-weight of a man bustling with energy. He was rated one of the best engineers in the army, a man who got things done. He was a career soldier, hard as nails, the sort of a fellow who would shoot and ask questions later.

At the captain's table stood Colonel MacClosky, son of World War I's "retreat-hell-we've-just-arrived" MacClosky. A big map was tacked to the wall behind him. Mac was attached to headquarters staff and had been assigned to explain details of the operation.

"Most of you," he began, "know what our job is. This is going to be a delicate operation, the most delicate any American force has ever attempted. If it's to succeed, and it will, every

man must carry out the job assigned to him to letter-perfect detail. We are to go in just east of Arzu." He pointed to a dot on the map. "The assault troops will go in ahead. We'll anchor a few miles off shore out of range of the French coastal batteries and wait for the signal that the beaches have been cleared. Then we'll disembark and head inland for the airdromes which should be captured shortly after dawn.

"We have a pretty good idea what the French have. We don't expect much resistance. Our secret agents have reported that we will be welcomed.

"A few hours before the operation starts, our agent at Algiers will inform the French that we are off shore. He will ask the French to welcome us as friends. We don't know how successful this will be. We may have to go in fighting.

"Assault forces will go ashore at Arzu, which is east of Oran, and at Les Andalouses, west of the city. They will cut inland and head for Tafaraoui and La Senia airdromes. Others following the same route will start a pincers movement on Oran, timed with a direct attack upon Oran from the sea.

"As soon as the airdromes have been captured, carrier-based planes will land. Then other planes, our bombers, will fly in from Gibraltar and Britain.

"Similar pincer movements will be carried out at Algiers and Casablanca.

"The whole operation is based on speed. That means that all forces must carry out their assignments to perfection. Air and ground forces will work in closest cooperation. While our ground forces are striking at the beaches, carrier-based planes will sweep the coastal batteries. Paratroops will take the air fields.

"We will pass through the Straits on D-minus-two, two days before the zero hour," MacClosky explained. It was now Thursday. I had gathered from various conversations that we expected to go through Gibraltar Friday or Saturday, depending on the moon. We were waiting for a moonless night to start the operation. The moon was waning fast. I figured we would attack about

Saturday or Sunday, at dawn. "Now," MacClosky was saying, "we haven't run into any trouble yet. But we are getting into the trouble range. Things are liable to start breaking when we enter the Straits." It was strange that we had sighted no enemy reconnaissance planes. Stranger still that we hadn't even had a scent of a U-boat. Surely Hitler knew all about this big movement.

"Hitler may be waiting to strike at us just after we hit the Straits," MacClosky said. "It's going to be touch-and-go there. Anything can happen. Spain might get excited and start some fireworks. We plan to go through the Straits and get fairly close in to the French African coast. We hope the move fools them. We want them to get the impression this is another convoy to Malta. We'll sail on toward Malta and after dusk turn and then get set off the French shore for the landings.

"We don't know the hour for attack yet. That will be radioed to us some hours before."

MacClosky coughed, looked over the gathered officers and said, "Any questions?"

Miller spoke up. "Are we still going on the assumption that we will meet no resistance?"

MacClosky said, "That's right. But we may have word between now and then to change the whole situation. Our agents report that the field looks good. But we won't know definitely until 0003 hours of D-day. Efforts will be made at the last minute to convince the French that it's useless to resist."

There were no more questions. We shuffled out of the dining room. Goddard explained that there were to be company meetings that night when finer details of the operation would be gone over. Miller had hurried off to meet with his staff. His job was to get ashore as soon as possible and set up communications.

We came out on deck. The sea was calm and blue. The sun was blazing. For the moment I forgot our mission. Just like a holiday cruise, I thought. It was hard to believe that we were getting closer and closer to the death and destruction of war. The

setting was strangely placid. We were in our shirt sleeves and wearing sun glasses. Some of the officers were lying spread-eagled on the sun deck.

"What about that conference now, Parris?" Goddard suggested. "Okay," I replied. Coster said, "I'll be with you in a minute. Find a good place in the sun while I run down to the cabin."

## CHAPTER SEVEN

"THE success of this campaign," said Major Coster, leaning back on his elbows as he stretched in the sun on the upper deck, "will depend greatly on a small group of State Department agents. They began laying the groundwork for the occupation of French Africa a year before Pearl Harbor."

The ship pitched and rolled through the sunny afternoon. The war seemed a long way away.

"What I am about to disclose," Major Coster added, "is really an unbelievable story. A story of diplomacy with the French, scheming against the Axis, and philosophic swallowing of unjust criticism from the United States by the men who have risked their lives day and night for months. I know. I was one of them for a while.

"You might call these men soldiers without guns. Theirs has been a war of wits, an undeclared war. I doubt if future historians, when they sit down to chronicle events of World War II, will even mention these men. But if this operation goes as smoothly as I believe it will, you can chalk it up as a great diplomatic victory.

"We have had our eyes on French Africa since the day France fell to the Germans. We knew that if French Africa went to the Germans, if the Nazis got Dakar and the other West African bases, it would present a direct threat to the Americas. At the

same time it would give the Germans control of the Mediterranean and neutralize Gibraltar as a base. Why the Germans never moved in on this part of the French Empire is something we probably never will know. From the day that France went crumbling we have expected the Germans to invade on some pretext or another.

"Washington saw the advantage of taking this step long before last June. A year before Pearl Harbor, to be exact. But we were not in the war and we couldn't move until we were at war with the Germans. But it didn't keep us from using other methods. We started fighting a war of wits, an undeclared war, with every method we knew, even bribery. We fought with words and money. Pearl Harbor changed all that. It gave us the opportunity to use force. So the machinery started moving. Last June when Churchill visited Washington, he and the President decided to move in on French Africa. Once in control of North Africa we would have a springboard to the Continent.

"I assure you," Major Coster said, "if we take French Africa in a lightning offensive without any hitches it will not be the result of lucky accidents. It will be the result of the work that Robert Murphy and the small group of men about him who have carried on patiently have accomplished. Every detail has been worked out to clocklike precision for this operation.

"Right now a submarine is preparing to pick up General Giraud on the French coast. He will be in Algiers a few hours after we land. He is to head a French government in Africa. General Clark and some other officers have already carried out a secret mission in Africa. They have plans of all the French defenses."

This sounded like something out of an Edgar Wallace opus.

"In two years," Coster continued, "Murphy has built up an underground organization in French Africa that would be the envy of Himmler. He's got agents in the army, navy, Foreign Legion, and even in government administrative quarters. It hasn't been easy. On one hand Murphy has had to combat Ger-

man agents and fight a flood of Nazi propaganda. On the other, he has had to handle Vichy with kid gloves. Both seem to have been carried off with miraculous perfection.

"Murphy went to North Africa with twenty observers, all young men with guts and plenty on the ball. Just as the Germans and Italians sent their agents into the country under the guise of armistice commissioners, our agents went in as vice consuls. They had been schooled in espionage and propaganda.

"We worked with the French on the assumption that they would never surrender French African bases to the Germans, that they wouldn't turn over the French fleet to the Axis. Murphy had served in Paris and Vichy with the American Embassy. He knew the French and knew how to get along with them. When Admiral Leahy arrived in France, Murphy took his leave and went to Africa. He was instructed to see and cultivate General Maxime Weygand, the key man in Africa at that time. Murphy was armed with broad powers. He tried to persuade Weygand to bolt Vichy and head a new French government under American supervision in Africa. The old general refused but remained silent about the proposal. He was sympathetic and told Murphy, 'If America decides to come into Africa, tell her to send a man, not a boy. If you send a small force we will fight, but if you send an army the country is yours.' Murphy won the complete confidence of Weygand and Weygand introduced him to the most influential French officials and tribal chieftains.

"It was through Murphy that we undertook to send Weygand limited quantities of essential supplies. There was a lot of criticism in America, also Britain, about this. What the public, and most of our officials, didn't know was that we were playing a big game for big stakes, that we had embarked on a long-range plan that one day would pay off golden dividends.

"Naturally it was not safe to reveal that our negotiations were going so smoothly. The Germans might have been provoked into precipitate action. So Murphy and his men swallowed the criticism and kept on working.

"For a time Murphy and his men were permitted unrestricted travel by plane and car to any part of the French African colonies. Then the Germans became suspicious and protested to Vichy. Some of our consulates were closed but we maintained the principal ones, Algiers, Oran, Rabat, Casablanca.

"The Germans flooded the country with more agents, until they had about three hundred and fifty in the country. They had fine American cars and plenty of gasoline to run them. Supplies to our men had stopped coming in. There was no gasoline. Murphy had to garage his car, use a bicycle and go afoot around Algiers. It was funny seeing us walking while the Germans rode by in big American cars.

"We made friends with the Arabs, saw that they got some supplies. We passed out money to them for propaganda purposes. Our vice consuls concentrated on building up an underground organization among the French.

"But the Germans were not idle. They forced the removal of Weygand and after Pearl Harbor tried to force the recall to Vichy of all Frenchmen whom they suspected of close association with us. We lost quite a few of our most trusted agents.

"Some of our French agents were caught by the Germans. They just disappeared. We couldn't protest. It would have tipped off our hand. We learned of some of the ingenious methods of torture the German agents used on some of our Frenchmen. Their favorite method was to take a live electric wire and run it into the private organs of the victim. I saw one of our women agents who had gone through this horror. She was practically insane. She couldn't bear for anyone to touch her.

"Our strongest strength lies in the French army. We don't think we will have much resistance from them. When we strike, our agents within the army are expected to handle the situation. Most of the officers are on our side. The navy and the Foreign Legion are the tough ones. We have some agents in the navy, but we don't believe they will be able to pull off the show. The

French navy just naturally obeys orders. The Foreign Legionnaires like to fight too much to sell out.

"There are about thirty thousand Foreign Legionnaires. They are the crack troops in Africa. They are well equipped and have considerable armored units.

"Just after midnight of D-day, Murphy will hand the French officials in Algiers an ultimatum. He will tell them we are about to strike. He will try to persuade them that it is useless to resist. He may pull it off. If he does, he will radio headquarters and we will come in without resistance.

"At the same time Major Bill Bentley will land at La Senia with a similar ultimatum. His job will be to persuade the French to let us use La Senia airdrome. He will be followed by transports carrying paratroops. With the airdromes in our possession we won't have to worry about air attack even if the land forces do resist.

"The whole operation more or less depends on those first two hours after midnight on D-day.

"But there are other things to take into consideration which might throw the whole operation out of tune. We don't know what the Spanish are going to do when they see the big convoys moving through the Straits. They might get the idea that we are going into Spanish Morocco. On the other hand the Germans, who thus far appear to have ignored our movements or else they have been completely fooled, might wait until we get through the Straits and start work. They might even invade Spain. If they did that they would immediately neutralize the Gibraltar air base, where our planes have been concentrated for this job. As you know, the Spanish have a series of gun emplacements right along the edge of the Gibraltar airdrome. With our planes packed in there wing to wing, those guns could sweep the airfield clean and knock out our air power within a matter of a few minutes. That would be a serious blow."

I interrupted Coster. "Do we expect any trouble from Spain?"

He shook his head. "No," he replied, "but we've got to keep our eyes open. Once we have started this operation, that is, once it has been announced, I suppose the State Department will inform Spain that we have no designs on Spanish Morocco. That's another point we have got to watch. When we land in French Morocco we just hope the Spanish don't think we are going to move in on Spanish Morocco and come across the borders to help the French."

"What about the Germans in France?" I asked. "Will they move into Unoccupied France?"

"I don't think there is any doubt about that," Coster replied. "I feel pretty sure they will move into Unoccupied France just as fast as they can. They may already be moving in if they know our intentions. They'll want to secure bases just as close to Africa as they can. And I believe they will make an effort to get the French fleet at this time."

Coster explained that this operation had been planned for speed, along lines of lightning execution, rather than of blood and bullets. To be a success, it had to be won quickly. A long-drawn-out bloody battle with French troops would mark the campaign as a failure.

"It's got to be a blitz," he said.

The problem, he added, was one of amphibious warfare—recognized as the most difficult of military operations. "I don't suppose," Coster said, "there's ever been an operation like this. In the number of troops participating, the size of the supporting fleet and the distances involved—ships operating from bases in Britain and the United States—this expedition is probably the largest in history.

"The biggest fleet ever involved in an operation is being used. There are some five hundred troop and supply ships, escorted by three hundred and fifty naval vessels. Forces which are to take part in the Algiers and Oran shows sailed from British ports. The force moving against Casablanca and other West African points sailed from the States.

"There are only a few British troops in the operation. This is to be an American show. At one time during the planning British troops were marked to carry out the occupation of Algeria and leave the Americans to handle French Morocco. But this was ruled out because of the French hostility against the British. They don't think very much of the British, not after the Mers-el-Kebir naval battle. So it was finally agreed that since the French liked the Americans it was best that we should handle the whole show with the exception of a few British troops landing at Algiers."

Coster reviewed the steps leading up to the actual embarkation. He began with Churchill's visit to Washington in June when he and the President decided to open a second front in French Africa. After much spade work, General George C. Marshall, army chief of staff, Admiral Ernest J. King, fleet commander, and Harry Hopkins, the President's personal representative, arrived in London late in August. A final decision as to the points of attack, the number of men, and the naval protection were then settled.

"Planning then shifted," Coster explained, "from the strategic to the technical phase. Ports of embarkation were selected. Plans were made to shift vital shipping from one theater of operations to another without arousing suspicions. Fighting units were chosen and trained for particular tasks, such as the Rangers, paratroops, and tank corps.

"We had complete data on French Africa. We knew every air base and how many planes the French had. We knew the disposition of the French fleet. We knew how many Legionnaires there were. We knew what the feeling of the French army and navy was toward an American move. Thanks to Murphy and his men we had a blue-print so complete that we built models of objectives. We studied every inch of beach along more than a thousand miles of coastline. We selected points for landing for their strategic importance and where we would likely meet the least resistance. We knew where all the defenses were, how

many coastal guns and their size. We studied port capacities. We knew the hours of the tides and when were the best times to launch our invasion barges. The tides along the French African coast are tricky even at their best. The British furnished us with aerial photographs of all the air and naval bases, all the principal objectives.

"The combat teams were sent through their paces on terrain as similar as possible to that of French Africa. They studied maps and small models of beaches and forts. They studied landmarks to familiarize themselves with the places they are to take."

Coster explained how staff officers had studied the Norwegian campaign carefully in order not to make the mistakes of the British in their invasion to help the Norwegians. During that campaign some British units had landed on the rocky Norwegian coasts without all of their vital equipment because it had been loaded on another ship which never did arrive. In order to make sure that this mistake wouldn't be repeated, each fighting force on a transport was made self-sufficient. Each carried anti-aircraft guns, artillery, tanks, commandos, and infantry.

The major figured there were about seven hundred thousand different items of equipment and supply in these convoys. There were complete bridges, locomotives, and the newly discovered steel landing mats for planes in case there was a lot of mud, and about sixty-eight thousand items of medical supplies. There were bulldozers and well-digging equipment. Not to mention food, gasoline, ammunition, and three pairs of shoes for each man set ashore.

I wondered how many man-working hours had gone into the preparations for this operation. It would probably require an Einstein to work out.

"You know," said Coster, "this operation offers attractive prospects. From Britain's point of view, it's a move to recover lost ground."

It certainly did at that. It offered Britain the chance to regain

the complete control of the Mediterranean which she lost when France refused to continue the war after the fall of Paris in 1940 and permitted Hitler to break out of the iron ring of blockade which had strangled imperial Germany in the Kaiser's day.

Recovery of the Mediterranean would give the United Nations possession of air fields all along the coasts of French North and West Africa. Once again the Allies could send men and guns through the inland sea not only to fortify the Middle East against Nazi attack but also to reinforce Russia, who desperately needed help.

"Once we have secured air bases in French Africa," Coster explained, "we can start hammering at the European continent. It's a good springboard to the Continent. The Continent will be in easy range of fighter planes. Our bombers can soften up the Continent and then we can invade through France or Italy or the Balkans. Taking Africa means tightening the ring of steel around Hitler for the knock-out blow."

Coster stretched and said, "Well, I guess that's about all." He got to his feet. The sun was hot now and the ship was loping along through a calm sea like a broken old race horse heading for green pastures.

"Reckon we'll be going through the Straits tonight," spoke up Goddard for the first time in more than an hour. "The moon went last night. So we'll find it nice and dark."

I decided to take a turn around the deck before going down to tea.

On the starboard promenade deck a company of Negro troops were going through calisthenics. As I passed, the Negro sergeant who was putting the black boys through their paces looked at me. His face seemed familiar. I walked on a few steps and leaned against the rail. The sergeant kept watching me. Finally, he called a corporal and turned over the exercise to him. He walked over to where I stood. He was grinning now, his white teeth shining.

"You're Mister Parris, ain't you?" he asked. "That's right,"

I said. His smile burst like a ripe watermelon. "Don't you remember me? Don't you remember how I used to fix whiskey-and-sodas for you?"

For the moment he had me. I couldn't place him. Had it been in Memphis, New Orleans, Atlanta, Raleigh or Winston-Salem? Then I remembered. Winston-Salem. The Robert E. Lee Hotel. Five years ago.

"Great God, Marion!" I shouted. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm in this man's army now." He grinned. "I'm in the medical corps. Got myself some stripes, too." He looked proudly at his sergeant's bars. Marion Ingram in the army! It was hard to believe. He used to slouch around the Robert E. Lee like a sleep-walker. But he was a good fellow, I recalled. Always had a whiskey-and-soda waiting in my room when I came in from a trip out of town.

"You'se the first person I seen from home since I left," he explained. "It's shore good to see you." Then the smile faded and he grew serious. "Reckon there'll be any fighting, Mister Parris?" I said I guessed there would be. "Well," he drawled, "I'se got my razor."

I moved off to tea while Marion went back to his calisthenics. I didn't see him again. Later when I was in Africa I wondered if Marion had got to use his razor.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

THE greatest naval armada in history slid silently into the Straits of Gibraltar at midnight, November fifth. The sky was star-specked but there was no moon. A north wind was herding little clouds into a big cloud and driving it south. The wind was prowling down from Spain and fanning across the Straits and blowing into Morocco with its palm trees, rivers, jungles, plains, and white vistas of sand. Wisps of damp cotton drifted across

the bow of our ship. Three boys in khaki stood beside an anti-aircraft gun, the collars of their heavy coats turned up around their necks.

The three boys were tense and listening. The night was silent. There was only the swish of water against the plates of the troopship as it slipped along at half-speed, a gray ghost in the night. A string of lights danced along the Spanish Moroccan coast.

"Anything can happen from here on out," said the boy from Brooklyn. "We're on the last leg. I hate to think of those subs and planes lying out there in wait for us."

"Seen anything?" Max Boyd asked the boy from Brooklyn.

"Nothing yet," he answered. "Sometimes I think I see something but it's only a patch of fog. You get to seeing things that ain't there."

"We thought we heard a plane," said the boy from Tennessee, "but I reckon it was just the wind." He cupped his hands and blew on them to warm them. "This sort of thing gives me the creeps. I'd rather be back home 'possum huntin'. What's that?" He cocked an ear to the east.

We listened. There was a faint hum. The wind again? No, it was too loud. Sounded like a plane. It grew nearer, louder.

"Maybe we'll get a shot at something," said the boy from Maine.

"Got orders not to fire until the other fellow starts something," said the boy from Brooklyn. But he threw the safety catch on his gun and swung it to make sure it was all right.

"There she is!" shouted the boy from Tennessee. He pointed into the blackness almost directly over our heads, just a little to starboard. Then we all saw her. A black shape with red and green lights. "Must be friendly," said the boy from Tennessee.

"Let's hope so," said the boy from Maine. "If she isn't we may wake up in another land."

The plane passed over the ship at less than a thousand feet. There was a sizzling brilliance. The night was suddenly white. A flare blossomed off our starboard side.

"Christ!" said the boy from Brooklyn. "I don't like this a little bit."

The flare died. When we picked out the plane again it was circling, heading toward Gibraltar.

"Just signaling the Rock that she's friendly, I guess," said the boy from Tennessee. "Guess she's been out patrolling. They ought to tell us these things."

Nobody spoke for several minutes, minutes that seemed like hours. Then it was the boy from Brooklyn. He had forgotten the plane.

"Them folks over there," he said, pointing toward the Spanish Moroccan shore where the lights danced, "don't know what's going on. Don't guess they suspect a thing. They're over there drinking and having a good time and a war's about to pop all around 'em." He blew on his cold hands. "Christ," he said, "I'd like to be over there for a drink, just one, and a little bit of you-know-what."

We slipped on past the great rock that is Gibraltar. Through the night glasses it looked like something a kid might have cut out of a piece of black cardboard. The lights on the Spanish Moroccan coast were fading.

Boyd and I went looking for coffee and cake.

It was almost four o'clock.

We ran into Goddard in the mess.

"Come on over," he said, "and have a cup of java." He washed down a mouthful of cake as we sat down. "Can't you guys sleep?"

"Your conscience doesn't seem to be clear," Boyd retorted.

Goddard laughed. "Same old Max," he said. "I'm up seeing the sights. Did you get a look at the plane?"

"We did," said Boyd.

"Thought we were in for a packet of trouble for a minute."

We sat fanning the breeze until dawn, talking baseball and football, praising and berating the Dodgers, depending on which

side you were, and wishing we were going to be home for the Army-Navy game.

Coster strolled in, rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

"Buddy, can you spare a dime?" He held out his hand to Goddard.

"Nope, you bum," said Goddard. "But I'll stake you to a cup of coffee."

Both laughed. Coster sat down and joined the party.

"What brought you out so early?" Boyd asked. "Or did the other guy come home and you had to leave by the window?"

"My God, it was terrible," said Coster. "That second-story window was a long way from the ground." He rubbed an imaginary bruise on his arm. "The guy had a gun. What else was I to do?"

"I guess it was a forty-five," said Goddard.

Wasn't anything the matter with their morale. A fight a couple of days away and them carrying on like this. They made you forget what you were going into.

"Hurry up, Coster. Get that coffee down," Goddard said. "We're going up to see a sight for sore eyes. We rendezvous with the Algiers convoy in a few minutes."

We drank the last of our coffee and went above deck.

## CHAPTER NINE

"WHAT sort of miracle is this?" Coster said as he stepped out on deck. There was awe in his voice. "It's unbelievable! Christ, did you ever see so many ships?"

"Maybe it's a mirage," I said.

"No, it isn't a mirage," Goddard said slowly. "That boy up there won't think so either." He pointed to a tiny speck circling in the sky. "Can't you just imagine the report he will carry

back? 'Hundreds of ships, Herr Commandant. Hundreds, I tell you. More ships than there are in the world. Everywhere there are ships. The whole Mediterranean is full of ships.' And the commandant shouting back, 'Impossible! You're sick. They couldn't have that many ships. What do you think our submarines have been doing? Go get some sleep.'

"A modern streamlined Spanish Armada," said Coster.

"Nuts!" said Goddard. "This makes the Spanish Armada look like a bath-tub fleet my kid's got."

We thumbed through our history recollections for a parallel to this. We couldn't find any. Nothing to equal this armada of five hundred ships, big ships.

"If I remember correctly," said Coster, "the fleet which Xerxes sent from Persia to invade Greece in 480 B. C. was supposed to have numbered several thousand ships."

"Yeah, but they were scarcely bigger than ferryboats," said Goddard. "Nothing like this."

"How large was the Spanish Armada which attacked England in 1588?" I asked.

"Oh, it only consisted of one hundred and thirty-two ships," Coster explained. "It carried thirty-three thousand men."

"I reckon we got close to three or four hundred thousand men in these ships," said Goddard. "Lot of men."

Men in khaki and blue were at action stations on every ship now. They stood silently by their guns, watching and waiting. Watching the sky, watching the sea. Waiting for the drone of a plane, waiting for the trail of white on the sea that would mean a torpedo. These were dangerous waters, submarine-infested waters, and the convoy was in range of Axis shore-based planes.

We wore our steel helmets when we went on deck now, carried them with us to mess and to the library. Wherever we went we carried the big steel helmets. Officers carried their pistols and we slept in our shoes. The next time the alarm sounded it would be the real thing. The next time the sirens shrieked it would be

a real air raid. The next time the gongs started clanging it would mean abandon ship. The lifeboat drills were over now.

We watched the mass of ships maneuver, break up into smaller convoys, each assigned to a specific point on the French North African coast.

We had gone through the Straits in four separate units. The Algiers convoy had split in two. The troopships went through first, then the supply ships. The Oran convoy had followed similarly.

Now the ships were lining up again. The Algiers convoy reformed first and steamed west. Then the Oran convoy.

Somewhere out there along the Mediterranean they would split again. The combat forces would break away and head for points along the African shore.

The Algiers armada of warships, troopships and cargo ships swung majestically southward as the sun fell over the western horizon on the Mediterranean. It was November seventh.

The ships swayed laboriously in the motionless sea as they maneuvered the turn that was to be largely responsible for deceiving the German and Italian air forces. The sun seemed almost to plummet out of sight in a blaze of orange and yellow.

The convoy was fifty-five miles due north of Algiers and, in the few moments it took them to turn their bows toward the beaches of the African coast, the darkness of a moonless night covered them.

This was just a small part of the greatest overseas striking force in history. This was just the Algiers landing force, and opposition in the Algiers area was not expected to be as heavy as that at Oran and Casablanca where larger, more powerful forces were massing to strike the United Nations' first land offensive against the European Axis.

Most of the ships steaming slowly and cautiously southward toward Algiers were troopships and cargo ships, carrying tense, highly trained British and American troops waiting eagerly to set foot on dry land for the first time in almost a month—and to

fight, many of them, for the first time in their lives. But these ships also included a few cruisers, several destroyers, some aircraft carriers, a monitor with two fifteen-inch guns and scores of tiny motor launches which had scampered around the convoy for two days hunting submarines.

Together, the heavy ships, destroyers and aircraft carriers mounted a concentration of fire capable of pulverizing the city of Algiers and leaving it a flaming, smoking ruin before dawn.

The night was so dark it was barely possible to make out the silhouettes of the nearest ships. In a few minutes it was too dark to see anything except the phosphorescent glow of the water swirling against the sides of the British troopship in which Russell was riding to war.

In a few hours, at exactly 1 A. M., thousands of American doughboys and British Tommies would wade ashore at Algiers and many more thousands of Americans would hit the beaches near Oran and Arzu and Rabat and Casablanca. The American occupation of French North Africa and West Africa, exposing the soft under-belly of the Axis, would be under way.

The twelve-day journey from Great Britain had been surprisingly uneventful. We had sailed unmolested through waters which Hitler claimed are controlled by his submarines and airplanes. The weather, for the most part, had been mild, like a southern cruise, but generally cloudy. For at least a week, the Royal Air Force Coastal Command had given the expedition "air cover," giant Sunderland flying boats circling lazily overhead scouring the ocean for U-boats. Only once was there a rumor of submarines near us. They were supposed to have been sighted somewhere to the south of the convoy, but Coastal Command elected to leave them alone and avoid suspicion that a convoy was near. The convoy changed course and swung wide around them. Another time we dropped some depth charges and the rumor spread that we had knocked off a "tin-fish," the navy's appellation for submarine. When the convoy was out of range of planes from Britain, the tiny fighters of a converted aircraft car-

rier in the escort furnished aerial protection until other planes from Gibraltar could resume the patrols.

It seemed incredible that Berlin and Rome should know nothing of this expedition, which, according to gossip, had forced a temporary cancellation of all other convoy schedules in the Atlantic.

Even after we slipped through the Straits of Gibraltar and there could no longer be any doubt that Berlin and Rome knew the whereabouts of at least the Mediterranean section of the Allied expedition, there was no real effort to stop it. But the careful strategy worked out by the Admiralty in London undoubtedly had something to do with that.

After passing through the Straits, the faster half of the Algiers convoy took a northerly course, skirting the southern Spanish coast within plain view of the snow-covered Sierra Nevada mountains. This was a deliberate feint toward Malta. The northerly course was held until sundown, November seventh, and the trick worked.

The Axis, as was reported later, thought the convoy was headed toward Malta and would be within easier bomber and torpedo range the next day. The Axis had planned to strike when it passed Sardinia. That would have been time enough for their planes to maul the convoy to pieces before it docked.

Three or four high-flying Axis planes—they looked like mere specks in the clear sky—flew over the "Malta" convoy during the day of November seventh, taking photographs to prepare for the major attack planned for the next day. At dawn that morning, a single plane swooped low over the convoy and unloosed two aerial torpedoes. One of them hit an American Liberty ship carrying troops and it had to be taken in tow. The troops were disembarked later in landing-craft and sailed in them until they were taken aboard a destroyer. That was the only "incident" on the whole journey.

## CHAPTER TEN

A STAR SHELL blossomed lazily and then died in the hush of the gray-black night above the slumbering French North African coast. From somewhere out of the fringe of rising blackness a searchlight blinked, turned idly for a moment in a probing arc, and then swung upon an old American coast-guard cutter. It snapped off, there was darkness again for one breathless minute, and then the searing flash and angry crash of gunfire.

The earth trembled and shook and the air churned hot and cold under the convulsion of belching naval guns, heaving coastal artillery, and the muffled crump of bursting explosives behind the hills. White geysers erupted about the silently moving invasion craft drifting toward shore. The pulsating roar of motors throbbed above the ear-splitting hell. Diving Spitfires, their machine guns chattering death, shrieked in endless procession out of the moonless, star-specked sky, and silver-starred bombers opened their silver bellies and vomited upon the land. Tracer bullets splashed the early light with gold and crimson.

The time-beat of war sounded from Casablanca to Algiers.

The great naval armada lying off that endless shoreline silently, busily, efficiently disgorged American Rangers, lads in khaki and blue; green, new-to-battle infantry; artillery and tanks.

Armored, snub-nosed landing barges, darting from the big gray transports and slicing through the treacherous tides, carried the combat troops toward the sandy beaches, swept them unflinching into the teeth of shot and shell.

These were America's first invasion forces carrying out the greatest amphibious operation in United States military history.

We had crossed a thousand miles of the Atlantic from Britain and pitched through two hundred and fifty miles of the Mediter-

anean, and here, at last, was our goal—conquest of French Africa. Its many harbors and air bases would soon be used by American and British forces launching their “Unconditional Surrender” assault against Hitler’s Europe.

This was to be the springboard to victory.

To secure an overland route for supplies from the United States nearly all the striking force of the Atlantic Fleet lay off Casablanca. American battle-wagons traded shot for shot with the floating fortress *Jean Bart*, 35,000 tons of fighting machinery, most modern ship of the French navy. Here along the French West African coast the greatest naval battle of the campaign was under way. As it raged with growing intensity, American ground troops landed north and south of the city and fought their way inland in a great pincers movement.

Back in the Mediterranean off Mers-el-Kebir an old American coast-guard cutter, loaded with high explosives and ammunition, crammed to the gunwales with British commandos and American shock troops, surged toward the entrance of Oran harbor under the guns of seven French shore batteries and eight warships. She flew the Union Jack and her portholes were blacked-out. The phosphorescent water seemed to hiss against her plates. She was the H.M.S. *Walney*.

A group of French naval officers sat around a long mahogany conference table in a heavily curtained room of the Admiralty Building in Oran.

The gray-haired, tubby little man with the breast full of ribbons and the good six inches of braid on his sleeve stared in utter disbelief at the tall officer in blue who wore the insignia of a naval executive officer.

“Yes, it is true,” the tall officer in blue said. “In exactly ten minutes American forces will enter the harbor. My mission was to inform you of that. It is useless to resist. The Americans come as friends. They ask that you receive them as such.”

The old admiral’s lips trembled. The veins stood out purple

and swollen in his red face. "How do you know this?" he shouted. "How long have you known? You have betrayed France."

The tall officer in blue ignored the questions. He spoke calmly, deliberately. "I have given you the message I was instructed to give you. It is up to you to decide whether you shall fight or receive the Americans as friends. I have acted for France."

"Another Judas," the admiral blurted. "Just a traitor. I don't have to tell you what happens to traitors."

He pressed a button on his desk. The tall officer in blue got to his feet. Two naval guards entered the room.

"This man is under arrest," the admiral said. "Lock him up."

The admiral lit a cigarette. "We will fight," he said to the others. "Fight to the last. We haven't a moment to lose." For a moment he seemed to be listening. The night was quiet.

The admiral picked up a telephone and asked for a number. There was a brief silence. He slowly replaced the receiver.

"The line's dead," he explained. "More treachery."

He began shouting orders.

"Get to the ships and the shore batteries as fast as you can. Instruct all men to fight. Tell them we are about to be attacked. Tell them to resist with all their might."

The dozen officers hurried out leaving the old admiral sitting at the table, his hands lying flat before him, his eyes staring into the polished wood.

The lights were dim in the Oran military barracks.

The white-haired general turned to his orderly. "Call the men down to the auditorium," he said. "And make it quick. There isn't much time left."

He stubbed out the cigarette he was smoking, straightened his shoulders and walked out the door and along a passage leading to the huge auditorium.

Men in French army uniforms filed in as the old general mounted to the rostrum.

A hush fell upon the assembled soldiers. They waited for the words they knew would be historic.

"My men," the old general said, "American troops will be landing here shortly. They come as friends but we must put up a token resistance. Shoot over their heads and then surrender."

A whisper ran through the rows of men. Some smiled.

"You are confined to your barracks," the general said. "We won't go looking for trouble."

Each man was issued three bullets.

Algiers was a white, triangular wound against the dun hills behind the harbor.

A British destroyer nosed past the barges across the entrance to the harbor and darted up to one of the docks. A small force of American Rangers dropped over the side and scurried toward the big, white French Admiralty Building on the waterfront.

The crisp crackle of machine-gun and rifle fire shattered the silence of the early dawn.

The Allied bombers came in low over Algiers.

The French and Arabs and Berbers poured out of their houses and filled the streets. Their eyes lifted to the skies. They saw something drop from the planes, thousands of little somethings that floated and drifted and fluttered and spun toward the earth. The sky was white with these little white objects.

Then the French and the Arabs and the Berbers who gazed into the sky realized what they were. They were leaflets.

The leaflets fell in, the square and along the boulevard and on the roof-tops.

The wind blew one at the feet of a middle-aged Frenchman. He stooped down and picked it up. An American flag was imprinted on the front. The text was in French.

A dozen persons crowded around the Frenchman. He began reading aloud. These were the words:

"The President of the United States has asked me, as commanding officer of the American Expeditionary Forces, to con-

vey to all the people in Morocco and North Africa the following message:

"No nation is more closely bound by historic ties and deep affection to the people of France and their friends than the United States of America.

"Americans are striving not only for their safe future, but also for the restoration of the ideals, the liberties and the democracy of all those who have lived under the Tricolor.

"We come among you to save you from conquerors who would remove forever your rights of self-government, your right to religious freedom, and your rights to live your own lives in peace.

"We come among you solely to destroy your enemies and not to harm you.

"We come among you with the assurance that we will leave just as soon as the menace of Germany and Italy is removed from you.

"I am appealing to your sense of realism, self-interest, and ideals. Do not obstruct this great purpose.

"Help us, and the day of world peace will be hastened."

A little old French woman pulled the shawl closer about her shoulders. There was a faraway look in her old eyes.

"I remember the Americans in the last war," she said. "They used to buy wine from me. Now," her voice was low and the words came slowly, "now maybe we can all go back to France one day soon."

"Allo Maroc, allo Maroc . . ."

Moroccans turned up the volume on their radios.

". . . this is the transmitter of American armed forces . . ."

The announcer began broadcasting President Roosevelt's proclamation to the French people.

". . . the enemy must go . . ."

The tall, monocled German paced the floor of the German Armistice Commission headquarters in Casablanca. He was angry and he was shouting. A French officer stood in a corner

of the room watching the German pace back and forth, shouting in French, sometimes in German.

"Find that station," the German shouted, "and destroy it. I tell you it has got to be destroyed."

"But," the Frenchman tried to explain, "it seems to be broadcasting from Rabat. That means the city is in American hands."

The radio voice was now warning the French armies on land, sea, and in the air in North Africa to refrain from hostile action and follow certain orders.

". . . to all naval and merchant marine units: first, stay where you are. Second, make no attempt to scuttle your vessels . . ."

The French captain of the *Jean Bart* ordered his gun crews to keep firing.

". . . to coast-guard units: withdraw from the neighborhood of your cannon and your stations . . ."

The coastal batteries growled and hurled shot and shell toward the sea, toward the oncoming Allied ships.

". . . to aviation units: do not take off. All airplanes must remain in their usual places . . ."

A squadron of Dewoitines lifted from La Senia airdrome and winged away toward the coast. But the pilots at the Rabat airdrome were having trouble. Something was the matter with their planes. The motors wouldn't start.

". . . general orders: in general you must obey all orders given to you by my officers."

The voice said that General Eisenhower had given formal orders that no offensive actions should be taken against the French forces "on condition that for your part you take the same attitude.

"To avoid any possible misunderstanding," continued the American radio voice, "the French forces should identify themselves in daylight by flying the French Tricolor and the American flag one above the other, and at night by turning on a searchlight and directing it vertically toward the sky."

The curving black hills of the African coast were now an erupting volcano, spitting fire and hurling chunks of steel and shot in a forlorn gesture of resistance.

The beaches were a churning mass of doughboys and commandos with blackened faces and hands, scurrying in every direction, guns blazing, dodging, running, crawling, falling wounded, lying still, dying from French shrapnel and snipers' bullets.

But Frenchmen were dying, too.

Commandos, some who had been to Norway and others who had gone to Dieppe, knocked out gun-posts, blasted machine-gun nests with grenades, knifed sentries, and fought their way through the dock areas at Oran and Algiers and Arzu. They were battle-scarred veterans. A few had fought with the French in France and some had come out of the hell of Dunkirk. But for the Americans it was their first taste of smoke and shot and shell.

Some of the Americans went ashore at Algiers and Oran singing and shouting Rebel yells. Some of their grandfathers had fought with Grant and Sherman, Lee and Forrest. So it was not strange that in the heat of battle they fought with song and yell upon their lips. But it must have seemed strange and a bit uncanny to the French who, through all the bloodshed and wasted heroism, couldn't find time or the courage to sing and yell.

The Oran battle was at its height.

A wounded doughboy from Kentucky, lying on his back in a tunnel dug in a cliff just off the beach, turned to an American correspondent who was more dead than alive.

The boy from Kentucky wanted to talk. There were things running through his head, questions to which he could find no answers.

"They told us not to shoot," he was saying. "We didn't have a chance to shoot. They were waiting for us, it seemed. Don't

these Frenchmen know when they've had enough? Don't they know they haven't got a chance? God, don't they know we are too big for them? They may kill some of us, but our ranks will never break."

He was silent a moment. The roar of war fanned past the tunnel entrance.

"Hell," said the boy from Kentucky, "we want to help these Frenchmen, not kill them. Can't they understand that? Don't they know we are really their friends? Don't they know we have come to help them get back all the things Hitler took away from them?"

The wounded American war correspondent didn't try to answer the flood of questions.

"They're French and always will be French," he said. "The French die hard."

The bridge of the troop transport was a perfect ringside seat for the war. The old hulk swayed at anchor just off the sprawling little hill-top village of Saint Leu and just east of the French seaplane base at Arzu.

Out there a few hundred yards away the American invasion forces scrambled ashore and widened and consolidated their landings. They went about their grim job just as if it had been maneuvers back in Scotland where, a few weeks before, they had used the same tactics against a theoretical enemy with a skill and perfection that had made their commanding officer smile with pride.

The early light lengthened in the east, like a shadow running from the sun. A pale crimson glow spread along the hills to the west. Artillery flashes knifed the gray blackness like streaks of straight lightning. From behind the rising black hills a fiery brilliance danced like heat waves jumping from a concrete highway on a hot summer day in Mississippi and there was the muffled crump of high explosives.

A squadron of Spitfires, silver stars circled with red, white,

and blue on their wing tips, piloted by American kids who had learned all the little tricks of war over France and the Low Countries against the Luftwaffe, roared from out of nowhere, came winging in with throttles wide open at ship-mast height and laid a wall of smoke for more than a mile along the edge of the sea. They suspended a blanket of smothering gray between the shore and the gray convoy, hid the ships and the churning little barges from the beaches and the hills, blacked-out the targets on which French gunners were trying to train their artillery.

The details fell into place with a precision that made them a little Hollywoodish. It seemed like a picture unfolding on a screen. Now and then you saw a boy in khaki fall and lie still.

High on the hill that was Saint Leu, villagers stood in the street and watched, like a group of spectators on a picture set.

A Spitfire fell out of the sky and crashed in a field, churning up a cloud of red dust.

"Poor devil," somebody said.

You watched the red cloud of dust settle and thin.

You saw a figure walk away from the plane.

On this golden autumn Sabbath morning of November eighth the war seems to have moved on from the beaches here at Arzu to the hills and beyond where the desert stretches its white wastes in endless miles.

There in the billowing field of broom-sage, just under the brow of the hill, lies the still form of a boy in khaki for whom the war is over. The blood that has spattered and soaked into the crushed yellow-flowered shrubs is drying and turning rusty.

The little dome-shaped pillbox there at the entrance to the seaplane base is shattered and torn and gaping with shell holes. A French soldier lies in a grotesque heap. He has no face. Bits of skull and brains are scattered on the floor, mixed with plaster and bits of concrete.

But the sound of war has moved on.

The ship sways at anchor. Two British sailors stand at the stern fastening a piece of silk to a rope that dangles from a mast. Slowly they raise the piece of silk—the Stars and Stripes.

As Old Glory ripples up there above our heads, a broad-shouldered young giant from Illinois, Captain Clinton E. Frank of Evanston who made football history at Yale, lowers his arm. But his eyes are still fastened on that bit of patch-work silk.

"When I see her flying like that," he says, "I sort of get a lump in my throat. Until you've seen her break folds a long way from home you really don't realize how much she means to you."

The shore batteries here at Arzu are silent now and only the intermittent ping and whine of a sniper's bullet breaks the silence of the immediate shore. But from down Oran-way comes the muffled roll of heavy guns. When the wind freshens from the southwest it carries an acrid smell of gun powder.

To the east, on beyond where the pink, little champagne-manufacturing town of Monstaganem juts out into the Mediterranean along the coast to Algiers, there is still the sound of heavy cannonading. The boom of six-inch guns breaks and rolls like claps of big thunder. There are nine thunderous rolls within a matter of seconds. The British naval captain says it sounds as if a sea battle might be going on. From the sea behind Monstaganem smoke boils toward the horizon.

Two destroyers break through the smoke screen on our starboard side. Between them is the French troop transport *J'Amique*, her decks crowded with soldiers in khaki uniforms. They wear red fezzes. She's been caught trying to escape to the high seas.

The morning wears on, heavy and expectant, and the French are still resisting. We had expected the fighting, if any, to be short and only a sort of token resistance. Our State Department agents had reported only twenty-four hours before that there probably wouldn't be any shooting at all, certainly not any organized resistance to speak of. They had warned, however, if there was any resistance it would probably come from the

French navy and the Foreign Legion, that band of mercenary fighters of every land and every creed who fought for the pure joy of fighting and the little gold and glory that went with it.

The wireless room whistles and chatters in rattling cipher, bringing news of the landings, the progress of our lightning offensive.

" . . . Green forces landed west of Oran . . . sweeping objectives with little opposition . . ."

That is good news.

" . . . fighting is heavy in Oran harbor . . . our forces are meeting stiff resistance . . ."

This isn't according to plan.

" . . . red forces moving from east of Oran have met little opposition and are making rapid progress toward Tafaraoui . . . expect to reach airdrome by three o'clock . . . our paratroops have captured Tafaraoui but are being threatened by a strong Foreign Legion armored column moving up from Sidi Bel Abbes . . . reinforcements are needed. . . . La Senia airdrome is still in enemy hands . . . some of our paratroops have been captured. . . ."

There is no news of our progress at Algiers and Casablanca, but rumor is running rampant on the transport. Our forces have suffered heavy losses at Casablanca . . . Algiers has fallen without a shot. So the rumors go. The Germans have invaded Spain . . . Spanish Moroccans have joined the French and are crossing into Algeria and French Morocco . . . heavy fighting is going on . . . the Spanish have wiped the Gibraltar air field clean with machine-gun and artillery fire . . . dozens of American and British fighters and bombers have been destroyed on the ground. . . .

The ship is a floating rumor mill.

The continuous roll of heavy guns doesn't help to allay our fears.

PART II

*H.M.S. WALNEY*

*By Leo Disher*



## CHAPTER ELEVEN

FROM the start, the mist seemed to trail after Peters. It clung to him the day he went to London and said, emphatically: "I think I can do it!" When he left, they had given him the strangest command he had ever held, the most ticklish assignment of his long career.

As he walked from the Admiralty, he mumbled to himself. "I hope I can see this through," he said. "But the chances of coming out alive are slim."

Portly, partly bald, Captain Peters was fifty-three. He was not new to strange missions; he had been thirty-seven years in the British navy and a man gets around and does strange things in that many years. His courage was massive, like his shoulders. In appearance he was strikingly calm, almost annoyingly so, and the years had given him a deliberateness which made his speech as ponderous as his body. Physically, he was well-timbered, perhaps more full-bodied than portly. He had about him a sort of stubborn pride that caused him, on land or at sea, in fair weather or foul, to razor his cheeks and jowls so closely that they had a blood sheen. He was a bachelor, snugly and smugly so.

This was Captain Frederick Thornton Peters.

The mist, like rain, darkness, and secrecy, followed him. And he would have one or the other, or all three, with him to the very last.

The day Peters was given command, the British and American staffs of army, air, and navy were deep in planning an invasion. In broad outline the operation called for many task forces, nearly all of them to strike simultaneously, at one o'clock on the morning of November eighth. From Casablanca to Algiers.

Peters' mission was part of the plan. He was to take his task force into a certain harbor and prevent the scuttling of French ships. Additionally, he was to seize what he could on shore and hold on until columns traveling by land could reach the objective. And he was to strike at 3 A. M.—two hours after the start of the operation.

There were certain other peculiarities about Peters' mission . . . among them that his four ships, the two biggest one-time American coast-guard cutters, would sail British-manned under the American flag, at the end . . . and he would command some six hundred men—about the number which made the charge of the Light Brigade.

The name of His Majesty's Ship *Walney* began to appear in widely varying official reports in the fall.

Captain Michael Lempriere Bolitho, a young explosives expert of the Coldstream Guards who believed troops could be trained to live indefinitely on grass, was called into London. He was handed his orders. They read:

"Report to the *Walney*."

Captain Harold Vere Holden-White of the Royal Sussex Regiment who was attached to the commandos received similar orders.

At the home base, the name of the *Walney* was written above a roll of United States Marines, among them Private Robert F. Horr and Private First Class James E. Earheart, Jr. Horr got tapped by fate for the assignment. When it was decided in February, 1942, to send three hundred marines to the British Isles, a battalion was formed which in the last-hour count was discovered to have but two hundred and ninety-nine men. Suggestions that the detachment sail one man short were rejected, and the three-hundredth marine was sent to the group. It was Horr. Like the others, he volunteered for combat duty and was sent to the *Walney*.

During the late fall most of the countryside was bogged in

mud. Roads, assembly grounds in the American camps, became quagmires. There seemed no end to the rain. To Lieutenant John Cole, sloshing along in the mud and rain, it no longer mattered.

Cole had just attended a "briefing" in which certain Allied military plans had been disclosed to a few selected officers. Some four hundred enlisted men of his command were being sent on an operation so secret it was doubtful if the officer commanding the encampment was told just where they were going. The men themselves would be scattered aboard various ships until they reached a re-assembly point. Then they would transfer to just two ships for the final part of the operation.

The "Old Man" in charge was thirty-one. He was Lieutenant Colonel George Marshall, a wiry Floridian and a West Point graduate. He was married, had two children. His men swore by him. They said he was "a helluva man with a tommy gun."

Cole tramped up the road to the hut he shared with Captain Bob Fuller of the medical corps. He went in, hung his coat on a nail and began pulling out his duffle.

"Doc, I keep wondering . . ." he began.

Fuller squinted his eyes questioningly and waited. Cole seemed a little worried. He ran his fingers through his close-cropped reddish hair and stared out at nothing. Cole was only twenty-two. He hailed from Lexington, Kentucky. He had just been made acting adjutant to Marshall. But he was frowning.

"I keep wondering about my wife," Cole said. "There's still no mail—and it's about time for her baby."

"It's tough," said Fuller, who went on with his packing. He stopped a moment. "I believe we'll be on the same ship at the end, won't we?"

Cole picked up his pistol and studied it.

"Yes," he said, ". . . the *Walney*."

## CHAPTER TWELVE

THE rain was coming down like cats and dogs. The British port was black and lonely. The journey from London had been pretty dismal and tiresome.

At an old wharf, I stepped out of the car and passed my gear to a sailor and turned in the darkness to go down a flight of ancient and steep stone steps where an admiralty launch waited. Halfway down I stopped and looked back at the escort officer who had seen me to the port.

"Good-by, Major, and good luck," I said.

"You'll need the luck, Bill," he said.

The major stood there at the dock's edge a long time. Through the rain and the darkness I could see the tip of his cigarette. Finally it winked out.

The launch churned across the harbor. A giant liner loomed out of the darkness and the launch passed it, close to the bow. The water was choppy now and fog was beginning to swirl in. Then we were up against a silent ship as big as a destroyer but bulkier.

Nothing moved on the decks above and the boatsman yelled:  
"Ahoy! Ahoy, aboard!"

There was no answer. We moved in closer.

"Ahoy!"

A low voice answered, and it was apparent that a man had been standing there on the deck watching us.

"All right . . . come in slowly," the voice said.

I climbed to the railing of the ship and stepped to its decks. There was a dark figure there.

"I'm Bill Disher," I said, "and I'm reporting to the officer commanding."

I saw then that the man had a gun.

"It's all right," said another voice. Turning I saw another figure.

"I'm Commander Meyrick, the skipper," said the other voice. "Come this way." He led me across the deck. "Guess you could use a whiskey," he added.

We went down steps and through a companionway and into a cabin.

I had reached the *Walney*.

As I stepped through the door I saw four men. One was broad of beam, heavy, so close-shaved his cheeks glowed. He was a deliberate man. He wore black battle-dress, epaulettes on his shoulders.

"Meet Captain Peters, commander of the task force," said Meyrick.

Ranged to the left of Peters were younger men, one who spoke with a ponderous cold-molasses accent.

"Meet the Welshman," said Meyrick. "Lieutenant Paul Eric Aver Duncan. Quite a mouthful."

The other two officers were from ships in the harbor and were aboard for a conference. One was in American naval uniform. Not expecting Americans, I took him for British—and said so.

"Ah!" said Peters.

The captain gazed at me intently. "If you were a spy that would have been a fatal blunder," he said.

Peters had already seen my credentials and my orders and with great care had checked them with advices received from American headquarters. But thereafter, for days, he was to regard me a bit suspiciously. He was that kind of a man. In his business he could never be sure.

Meyrick rang for whiskey. He was handing me a drink and talking about mist when a lean-faced American in battle-coveralls stepped into the cabin.

"We're ready for the practice, Captain," the American said.

"Are all your men aboard?"

"All here, sir."

"All right, Colonel Marshall," said Peters. "Go ahead."

For nearly two hours, American assault troops brought from shore practiced boarding and debarkation. I watched from the bridge. Finally, the men went back ashore. I went below and turned in to sleep on a sofa in the officers' lounge.

By that hour the *Walney* was already so crowded that all her cabins were filled and Duncan was sleeping in a hammock strung in a passageway.

Still no one had told me where we were going or what we were going to do.

Streamers of mist floated around the *Walney* next morning and occasionally light gusts of rain pelted her decks. She had moved during the night to mid-harbor and had tied up to a supply ship which towered above her. Three sailors were mounting a heavy gun on the top-deck aft and I watched them for a while until the gusts suddenly turned into a drenching rain. I went below to the lounge and as I entered a red-haired American in battle-dress rose from the depths of a huge lounge chair.

"My name's Cole," he drawled.

"Lieutenant?"

"Right. Lieutenant."

We rang for the steward. While the drinks were coming, I said, "I thought all hands from Over Yonder had gone ashore."

"Most hands have but I'm staying," said Cole.

On the stairway a clatter of heavy shoes sounded and a British ship's officer came barging in, flinging his coat on a chair.

"It's bloody awful," he grumbled.

"What?" asked Cole.

"The weather."

"It isn't weather, it's a habit here."

"It isn't a habit," said the ship's officer, "it's just damned bloody."

Then in popped Sub-Lieutenant Peter Bentley, and "Doc," a baldish naval medical man, and Lieutenant Wallace Dempsey

Moseley, twenty-three, who said he was half American. The fellows called him "Number One," because he was second in command of the ship.

The ship's officer, who said he was an Australian, settled into a heavy chair. "In Australia there never is any bloody weather like this," he said. "If it's rain it's rain, and it's over. God! . . . I'll take cognac," he broke off to say to the steward.

"There isn't any cognac, sir."

"All right, I'll have brandy."

"No brandy, sir."

"Well, what the hell do we have?"

The steward said Madeira and whiskey. The Australian grimaced. He ordered whiskey.

"As usual, sir?" the steward asked, grinning.

"As usual," said the Australian. "Now, where the hell was I? Australia. It never has any of this soupy stuff. It has air . . ." He broke off again. "By the way, this is Captain Holden-White." The man he introduced was lanky, garbed in British battle-dress. "A commando," added the Australian.

It turned out the commando's name also was Harold. He was on his second drink when another lanky youth came over. There was a flash on his shoulder. It said, "Coldstream Guards." A much-abused British army cap was cocked on his head.

"I'm Michael Bolitho," he said.

The guardsman ordered Madeira. Then noticing the drink in Cole's hand, he changed his mind. "To hell with Madeira," he said. "Bring me a whiskey."

Cole grinned at him. "Cousin, you're cookin' with petrol," he said.

The lounge filled with men, emptied, filled again. The radio was turned up by one man, turned off by the next. Some read, some slept. The room became hazy with smoke. It went on like that until the *Walney* untied, and in the black, clearing night, began trembling to the turn of her engines..

She made for the sea. Her voyage had started.

Going no farther at first than the outer harbor approaches, the *Walney* turned and in long sweeps, back and forth, began patrolling. The night had cleared until the horizon was visible. A giant transport passed, then another. Great troopships began to file by in a long line from their anchorage. From the top of the *Walney's* bridge they bulked like darkened Leviathans across a half mile of water and there seemed no end to their passing.

"Twelve," somebody on the bridge counted.

"... thirteen . . . fourteen . . . fifteen . . ."

For a long time the voice went on tallying while the wind whipped across the bridge. Then the little man who was counting climbed to the crow's nest and finally came down and went below for a drink.

As he passed me, he said:

"That was a beautiful sight."

I followed him. In the wardroom we got a drink. The little man said, "You know some of them won't get back."

Peters stepped into the wardroom and sat down. "Tomorrow morning," he said, "you see the might of England." He made a great sweep with his arm. "The might of England spread out on the sea."

Much of it was. Daylight, when it came, gray and windy, showed a convoy had formed which in width and depth covered miles of ocean. Troopships in column steamed one on the wake of another. I also saw an aircraft carrier and near the carrier was a cruiser. On the flanks of the convoy, and ahead and behind it, ploughed smaller warships in the escort. Somewhere over the horizon, not far away, steamed a British fleet.

Monotonously, the great convoy cut its way through the Atlantic, steaming westward at first, then turning south, hidden at times by rain and fog. A thousand gunners were alert for Axis planes.

On the left flank, and then on the right, the *Walney* rode in the escort.

"This is a strange ship," I wrote in my war diary on the second day. "I have been all over her now, on the bridge and down in the hold. I have seen peculiar things. She has a queer assortment of men. She is called a warship but she is not a warship at all. At dinner last night I noticed that the linen and the silver were marked: 'United States Navy.' I asked the Australian about it. 'She isn't British and she isn't American—exactly,' he said. 'She used to be the bloody old *Sebago*—an American coast-guard cutter.' It gives me something of a chill to know that. She is not heavily armored, if she is armored at all. She has only two light guns on her decks, and one of those is new. She is like a ghost ship. In 1941 when the British needed Atlantic escort vessels, her American crew simply turned her over to them and walked away. They left their books. They left their radio, their chairs, their silver. All of it is still here, around me as I write. It is as if we had taken possession of a strangely deserted ship—a ship with plates on the table, the radio blaring, and not a living thing aboard her."

From the start, the *Walney* had listed a little. By the second day, with ammunition and depth charges piled high inside her, she wallowed as much as she sailed. She pitched; she rolled forty degrees, and there was no rough sea.

On the third day, Pimms, the navigator, stalked into the wardroom. "The skipper's sick," he announced.

Mike lifted his head. "Sick?" he said.

"Sea-sick," said Pimms, and he didn't grin, either.

"God!" Mike groaned, and turned his face to the back of his couch.

I wrote in my diary:

"Mike has been lying in the officers' lounge for all of three days. When meals are served at a table near him he waits until the steward signals him, then rushes over, gulps the soup, then rushes back to lie down until the next course is served. He never leaves the couch except to play poker or go up on deck to shoot at

tin cans . . . and then he always has the Madeira with him."

The *Walney* rolled so much that the chairs slid around the wardroom and the soup drained from the deep plates unless they were tilted.

Many days later, I opened my diary and wrote:

"The mystery which has surrounded the *Walney* from the beginning lifted a little tonight. It happened when Captain Peters came into the wardroom for dinner. Every night he follows the same routine. He has two drinks and smokes constantly. He talks about everything, anything—except where the *Walney* is going. But tonight it was different.

"From what he said, it is now clear that the *Walney* will pick up many American troops at some spot. Then, with a sister ship, she will go in to seize some harbor as part of a gigantic military operation. I still don't know the name of the harbor, but I do know there are seven shore batteries and seven warships, in addition to armed auxiliary vessels. The *Walney* will seize and prevent the scuttling of these ships—in some way.

" 'I helped plan it,' Peters said. 'This is the opportunity I have been waiting for.'

"It seems apparent now that the captain is planning a bold stroke. The *Walney*, with her heavy ice-crusher bow, will ram and attempt to break the harbor boom. Somewhere in the port, on a high hill, is a fort. Peters said, 'I will capture that fort and send an ultimatum to the town to surrender.' As he talked tonight, he puffed slowly at one of the little black cheroots which Duncan always lights for him. Peters seemed very confident, saying it could be done, and possibly without firing a shot. His eyes glowed as he said, 'I don't feel my best until I smell the smoke of battle—then, I really begin to live.'

"Poker started some days ago in the wardroom and tonight, after Peters left, the betting began going haywire. Everyone is playing 'I-owe-you' and the stakes are going into astronomical figures.

"Later in the evening, Number One called the crew together on their mess-deck and talked to them. He told them what we were going to do. 'Some of us will get in and get ashore,' he said. 'Some of us will get back—but the *Walney* won't.' "

As the convoy wallowed on through the seas we got a pretty good clue as to where we were going. The weather was steadily getting warmer.

Special drills started on the *Walney*. Meyrick called all hands to battle stations. He took them repeatedly through hypothetical battle, describing it over a loud-speaker system to the men. "The night is very black," he would say, "and we are now running in close to the cliffs and approaching the mouth of the harbor. Gunfire has opened up against us, but the shells are missing us . . . all hands lie flat for crash . . . we are approaching the boom!"

The men were also instructed in small-arms shooting. For hours on hours they shot at bobbing tin cans in the water with pistol and tommy gun.

The great transports rolled along to the left like painted ships on canvas the day the *Walney* shuddered and her engines stopped dead. The chief engineer sweated in the engine rooms and finally got the cutter going. But the convoy had swung by and left her. The *Walney* was alone, the only ship in sight on the ocean.

The chief engineer, a heavy-set, good-natured lieutenant of thirty-three, came up from the engines and stood by the rail to get cool. "Old boy," he said to young Bentley, "something went wrong with the wiring."

Late that day as we speeded to catch up with the convoy, I slipped and crashed hard to the deck. My left leg was doubled beneath me and there was an instant start of pain. When the ship's doctor had a look he shook his head. "It's broken," he said.

The ankle was swollen greatly. I told the Doc I had to move about.

"If you do," he said, "you'll move on crutches—if we can somehow make the crutches."

I thought: God! We're moving into battle, maybe in a few hours. And here I am a cripple!

I got the crutches.

It was night again and the poker players were at it, hard and steady. Mike let the cigarette smoke stream sidewise from his mouth and dropped another handful of chips to the table. "I'm raising again," he said.

Young Bentley sighed and folded his cards. Cole stuck to his, but when the commando Harold raised Mike and Mike raised back, the Kentuckian said, "Cousin, I was in the game," and tossed in his cards.

Number One hunched his way over to the players and stood watching. After a while he spoke, with his usual dryness.

"If it interests you, there is a good view from topside of the coasts of Portugal and Africa," he said. "We're going into Gibraltar."

"I thought it was about time," said Mike. He drew again at his cigarette and squinted at the commando captain. "Shall we make it for all we've got?"

"Bloody well right." Harold pushed in his stack of chips.

Mike rose, showing his hand. "I think I've got you beat," he said.

"I was bloody afraid of that," said the commando, looking at Mike's high card, a queen. "I was holding a jack."

As Harold got up from the table Cole saw something jutting from his pocket and touched it curiously. The captain looked down. He grinned. "Dynamite," he said. He followed Mike up the stairs.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE *Walney* eased into the Gibraltar anchorage. The great rock towered black at its crest against the Mediterranean sky. Thousands of lights glittered around its base. Across the Straits, the city of Tangiers patterned its glow into a crescent which traded sparkle with light-clusters from settlements ahead in Spain. Over it all there was a starry sky. And there was a deep quiet, unbroken except for the swish of water.

"They don't black out the Rock," said Bentley. "No use—when it looms like that."

The *Walney* moved on, easing at last close in to the rock. She dropped anchor. In the darkness, American assault troops—Colonel Marshall's—disembarked from their transports and boarded the *Walney*, filing below decks with their guns in their hands. Marshall came aboard with several of his officers.

By torchlight, the *Walney's* crew sweated great boxes of ammunition into the hold. The old cutter settled lower and lower into the water.

Somewhere near by other American troops were boarding the *Hartland*, sister-ship to the *Walney*.

When she had taken on her cargo of men and munitions, the *Walney* drifted away. As she picked up speed she trembled a little. Once again her engines quit. A great stillness settled over the cutter. Bentley waited it out on deck. He looked up at the mountainous loom of rock, saw beyond the black summit the star-flung sky. He noticed the stars were overhead . . . almost overhead.

"My God!" He began running toward the bridge as he yelled.

Afterward, almost at once, there was a slight jar. Nothing more. The *Walney* had gone on the rocks at Gibraltar!

She hung there. She was not greatly damaged, but the vast

hulk above the cutter almost jugged over her decks until a tug could drag her away. A searchlight turned upon her, casting the *Walney's* shadow eerily against the white stone of the fortifications while she gave way grudgingly. Finally, she was free.

Peters sent out a call for a destroyer and ordered all troops to transfer. The below-decks became a mad house. American troops with their guns filled the companionways and the ladders; officers pushed and cursed through, and came back; the crew sweated, lifting out the ammunition they had just stored in the hold.

In the wardroom I got my gear assembled and, laden heavily, struggled on my crutches through the crowds of soldiers to the open air. I reached the top deck just as an American officer came up and shouted to the soldiers, "Lie down and wait quietly until the destroyer gets here."

In Peters' cabin a strange scene was opening. Meyrick pushed open the door. "Sir, the Chief has got the engines going again," he said.

Peters looked questioningly at Duncan, who reported that the destroyer was due any minute now. Turning to Meyrick, Peters said, "Tell the Chief to report here at once."

The Chief clumped into the wardroom. Sweat stood out in beads on his face. He poured himself a drink and sank into a chair. He looked anything but happy.

"What's the trouble, Chief?" I asked.

"Old boy," he said, "the Old Man called me in just now. He said what I was about to say would be the most important thing I ever would say in my life.

"'Chief,' he said, 'out there waits a destroyer. If you say your engines won't make it, we transfer. If you say they will, we won't. But if you say they will—and they don't—so help me God I'll have you court-martialed.'

"I told him that on my professional honor they'd get us there. And by God they will!"

He downed his drink and poured himself another.

"Old boy," he sighed, "you can talk of getting to Berlin or

bust, but with me it's get where we're going now or bust . . . and I mean it!"

Down in the hold an officer approached the sweating crewmen handling the ammunition.

"Start it going the other way," he said. "We're staying with this."

On decks, when the announcement was made, British and American soldiers cheered.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

November 7, 1942.

In the sick-bay of a transport steaming eastward through the Mediterranean lay a chunky brown-haired soldier. He didn't appear to be seriously ill, but he was under treatment. The boy's eyes began turning slowly from side to side. Suddenly they stopped turning and the dullness gave way to a gleam. Jumping to his feet, he began running.

Hurtling past startled orderlies, the crazed soldier dashed to the top deck, leaving behind him an uproar. Seamen tried to clutch him, but before he could be stopped he plunged over the rail into the sea.

"Man overboard!"

The signal flashed through the convoy.

The lookout on a wallowing little vessel saw a form bobbing in the water ahead. The ship slowed its engines. Sailors threw out a lifebelt. The soldier grabbed it and was hauled aboard.

As the dazed, dripping boy was hauled aboard and carried to the medical ward, a voice said:

"Out of the frying pan into the fire!"

It was Mike who said it—and the ship which had rescued the boy was the *Walney*.

Duncan went down to the wardroom that afternoon and spread out some blue-prints on a table. He sat down and pulled out a heavy curved-stem British pipe which he proceeded to fill up and light. Once he had it going he took the pipe from his mouth and uttered one word:

"Oran."

The clue word to the mystery was out at last. Now we knew where we were going.

Duncan continued to talk, speaking ponderously with his heavy English accent, and as he went on, illustrating what he was saying with the blue-prints, an amazing plot unfolded for the *Walney*.

Now two years after a great naval battle between the British and French at Mers-el-Kebir, the *Walney* and her sister-ship, the *Hartland*, and two launches, were going to carry the war again to the sprawling ant-hill port.

Duncan explained that American and British forces would begin the invasion of French West and North Africa at 1 A. M. tomorrow.

Two hours later—at 3 A. M.—the *Walney* would strike. Two hours after actual operations had started!

The *Walney* had a delicate mission. She would attempt to break the chain boom blocking the mile-and-a-half-long harbor. If she failed, Mike would go over the side with his dynamite and do a bit of blasting.

"Once inside the harbor," Duncan explained, "we will drop our commandos. And once at the far end of the harbor we will dock."

From there, the colonel and Peters would lead assault troops up a hillside to seize the fort. If necessary, special naval boarding details would swarm over the railings of the French warships in the harbor and take them with tommy guns and grenades.

Through the gap in the boom made by the *Walney* would go the launches, and behind the launches would come the *Hartland*.

The *Hartland* would turn to a pier in the upper harbor and her troops would take care of a naval base and join the *Walney's* party.

"That," said Duncan, "is the set-up."

Much—a great deal—depended on whether the French would resist. Peters was gambling: staking his ships and his men on an attack which would be delayed two hours after the start of the general invasion. By doing so, he lost the advantage of surprise. The advantage would be his if the French decided against resistance.

But if the French decided to fight, the odds against the *Walney* and the *Hartland* would be colossal: they would be trapped with no guns and no armor in a nest of warships and coastal guns.

Peters came into the wardroom just before the briefing was finished. He appeared confident.

"I think we've got a good chance of carrying out our mission without firing a shot," he said. He sounded a little too optimistic.

As Number One hunched from the wardroom, I hobbled with him. "What happens if the warships leave Oran tonight and pass us going in?" I asked.

Number One smiled wryly.

"We worry about that," he said. "Did you stop to think what will happen if a U-boat gets us before we get there?" he added.

He was still smiling wryly as I hobbled off to get an American doctor who had come aboard at Gibraltar to put a cast on my ankle.

"I used to specialize in this sort of thing back in New York," the doctor said. "At the hospital where I worked some of the boys used to get pretty fancy with their plaster." He slapped on some of his mixture and grinned. "Want me to get fancy with this?"

The doctor's name was Fuller—Captain Robert Fuller—and he had been Cole's hut-mate in the United States.

I asked for a straight job and got it. I had trouble swinging

along to the wardroom on my crutches, but I finally got there. Cole was reading *The Life of Stonewall Jackson*. When he looked up and saw the cast on my ankle he laughed.

"When the bullets were flying," he said, "there stood Disher like a stone wall!"

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

AT TEN o'clock I slumped into a chair in the wardroom and picked up my typewriter and began writing a story to send to United Press—a story about men going into battle, what they said in those last minutes, what they did, how they felt. I wrote . . .

ABOARD A BRITISH SLOOP OF WAR APPROACHING ORAN, Nov. 7—(UP)—This might be a fashionable club room back in New York or London. It has that kind of atmosphere tonight. The war seems a long way off. The men are deep in the easy chairs, their legs hooked over the sides, reading and smoking.

In a few hours these men are going to be fighting—killing and fighting for their lives. But right now they are calm. And if they are thinking about the minutes ahead you can't tell it.

There are no jitters aboard this ship.

Along the lounge to the left of me are three big chairs lashed together. In them are two American infantry lieutenants and a British commando captain. Other officers are moving about the wardroom, waiting idly.

Lieutenant-Colonel George Marshall, commander of the Americans, just came down the broad stairway in the center, and after talking a moment with Lieutenant Victor Wales, Jr., of Washington, D.C., he went out again.

Directly opposite me, on the other side of the lounge, the

ship's doctor, a slight, baldish fellow, is spreading a white cover on the mess-table. That's where he will do his operating.

On the deck above, next to the top deck, the American soldiers are trying to sleep. They are stretched head to foot in every available space in the passageways. To get by, officers first must rouse the men. It's amazing that they can sleep now.

Marshall's adjutant, Lieutenant John Cole, 23, R.F.D. No. 1, Lexington, Kentucky, has just brought in a can of grease paint. The officers are spreading it on their faces and hands.

Cole eyed my leg judiciously and said, "It looks heavy." I told him it was heavy. "It needs some camouflage," he drawled and picked up the black grease paint. He daubed it on the cast. Then he said, "We'll have to float it." Stepping over to a pile of equipment, he picked up a life-tube and came back. He wrapped the tube around the cast. "One more tube," he said, "and it's certain to float."

"One more tube," I said, "and they can shoot me for a barrage balloon. Cousin, enough is enough."

It is now eleven o'clock. The heavy-set lieutenant who is acting as chief of staff to the task force commander has come into the wardroom. He's wearing American battle-coveralls. Two six-guns are strapped low on his hips in western-style holsters. Under his arm is a tommy gun.

The lieutenant will stand on the ship's bridge as we go into the harbor and broadcast to the French over a loudspeaker. He will say: "Don't fire . . . we are Americans . . . don't fire."

I asked Duncan if he would be talking in French.

"Yes," he replied. "French . . . with an American accent. I've been training, you know . . . you'd be surprised how good I am."

Midnight.

Mike came down a moment ago, blacked so that he looked like the end man in a minstrel show. He has explosives strapped to his waist and his legs. He is wearing British battle-dress. He just told the doctor: "If they get me in the legs, Doc, shoot me.

No, don't. But shoot me if they get me in the eyes—and for God's sake give me a drink first!"

The commando captain got out of his chair abruptly and stalked from the room. He had been sitting for some minutes staring at the wall. As he got up he said to no one in particular: "I've got it all figured out: I've got one chance in ten."

Most of the other officers have finished their preparations and have gone to their battle stations. Just before midnight, Colonel Marshall returned to the lounge and called his officers for a conference. He said a report had been received that there are now eight French warships in the harbor. A cruiser-type destroyer has tied up at the end of the harbor where we intend to dock.

Marshall said the plans had been changed slightly. He said we would go alongside the cruiser and board her with grappling irons.

As this is being written the ship is turning away from her convoy remnant. Two launches are following us with the cutter *Hartland*.

We are heading due south and have begun our final run for Oran, . . .

The Chief came into the lounge and crossed to where I was sitting. He seemed a little disturbed.

"Old boy, don't you think you'd better change your mind about going to the bridge?" he said. "It would be bloody awful getting down from there."

"Where, then?"

"I suggest the forward turret."

I thought it over. Mike would be in the turret, waiting his action. The door to the turret was on the main-deck level. It was armored.

"I'll do it," I said finally.

The Chief smiled his approval and started away. He checked his stride and then turned back.

"Bill . . ." he began.

He didn't seem to know what he wanted to say, or perhaps it was that he didn't know how to say it. He pulled a chair close to me and sat down.

"Look, Bill . . . will you do me a favor?" When I nodded he reached into his tunic and pulled out his wallet. He drew out a card and handed it to me. "If I don't get back from this and you do," he said, "will you go to this address in England and tell my wife . . ." His voice dropped to a rough whisper as he gave me that final message.

I continued writing:

It's 1 A. M. now. As the clock struck the hour the ship's doctor glanced at it and said: "The show's started."

As I write, the invasion of Africa is starting. Men are piling from landing barges, dashing ashore . . . and under gunfire? We haven't heard.

I was the only one in the wardroom to hear the doctor's words. Fuller, who had been helping the doctor lay out his instruments, had gone to his own station on the second level of the bridge, just below the captain.

Up to now we have been sailing under the Union Jack, but a few minutes ago we hoisted the Stars and Stripes.

I have put on my helmet now and have strapped another life-tube around my chest. Nothing more remains but to hobble up the ladders and go to my station.

Yes . . . one thing more: I have to tell the doctor good-by.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

DARKNESS wrapped the *Walney* and the *Hartland* and the two launches so completely it was impossible to see one from the decks of the other. Even the high cliffs of the African coast ahead were distinguishable only as a blacker blob in the black

ness, like the slightly darker sludge at the bottom of an ink flask.

I made my way from the stern toward the bridge: I had changed my mind.

When I left the doctor in the officers' lounge I had intended going to the forward turret. But for some unknown reason I decided against it. Bracing on bulkheads and lifeboats as I swung my crutches, I made for the bridge.

To get there, I had to climb two steep steel ladders. At the top of the second one the bridge structure flared out into wings, with open walk-ways extending to the sides and to the rear of the steel-topped, steel-sided portion which overlooked the bow from midships. There were wide windows on every side. On the deck below, reached by ladders inside and out, was the sick-bay.

On the bridge wing stood Cole.

I knew it was Cole by his voice. I couldn't see anything except a dark blur.

"It's a little chilly," he said. He had dropped his playful exaggeration of American speech. Now he was serious, alert. Not the boy who had left the classrooms of the University of Kentucky to go to war. John Cole liked to grin, but he wasn't grinning now. He was a man with a tommy gun. And he knew how to use it.

"Has the Colonel come up yet?" I asked.

"He's coming."

"Peters and Meyrick?"

"Up front."

The water hissed loudly against the sides of the ship. I looked down and saw the darting spots of phosphorescence. Except for the spots, we seemed all alone . . . two flecks in the ink.

"I figure I won't get it," said Cole. "A lot of fellows go into battle and don't come back . . . but a lot of them do. I figure I might as well think I'll be one of those who do."

Neither of us said anything for a long time. We stood there

in the night, looking and waiting. For what, we didn't exactly know.

A black form came up the ladder and hit my crutches before I could move back.

"Disher?"

"Yes, sir?"

"I don't like to see you go into battle without a weapon. I'm giving you my automatic."

It was Colonel Marshall.

"I've got a tommy gun," he explained. "If I find myself needing the forty-five, I'll yell out for it. Take it."

Hell, I wasn't supposed to have a gun. Well, I didn't have to use it. I didn't want to offend the Colonel, so I took it.

"Thanks, Colonel," I said, sticking the automatic under my belt. Marshall turned and went forward.

"He's a great guy," said Cole, breaking the silence. "I'd follow him to hell if there was need for it." He leaned over the rail again, watching the sparks of water.

Cole didn't speak again for five minutes. Just stood there looking at the water. Then he straightened up.

"Constance should just about be finishing dinner now," he said ever so softly. "I keep wondering if the baby is born . . . and whether it's a boy or a girl. The mails have been so delayed and I have been getting about so much I haven't heard."

Then he abruptly began talking about a rope which dangled just beyond the rail toward the lower decks.

"There's a way down for you . . . if you need it," he said.

I tested the rope and found it fastened securely.

Then we both went forward into the bridge.

A few dim instrument lights glowed inside. I kept bumping into men. I estimated there were about twenty in there. Finally, I got to the rear, out of the way. I was in a shallow passageway with windows open to my right and behind me. The ladderway to the sick-bay was on my left.

I recognized Duncan's voice near me. "What time is it?" I asked.

"A little after two. We've got less than an hour left."

We stood there. The men near me were silent. Occasionally I could hear the voices of Meyrick, Peters, Marshall, and Cole, who were at the front of the bridge. Once Meyrick announced:

"I have just received a message from our people. It says, 'Landings up to now have been carried out without shooting. Do not start a fight.'"

In the darkness everyone laughed.

Shortly afterward, breaking a long period of silence, a look-out on the starboard wing called to Meyrick:

"Star shells off our starboard bow, sir!"

Meyrick said, "Good!"

It was about five minutes to three.

A British cruiser, on schedule, was creating a fireworks diversion off the harbor.

My crutches had begun to wedge painfully into my arm pits and my right leg was becoming exceedingly weary. To ease it, I braced the crutches across the passageway and leaning on them with my forearms, rested by pushing hard with my back against the bulkhead. From that position I could see, across the twenty feet of the bridge, the high bulk of cliffs, now very near. We were running parallel to them, heading westward. Ahead now I saw the gleam of scattered lights.

It was Oran.

We became silent on the bridge. There was no sound anywhere except the constant swish of the water against the ship's plates.

Then a searchlight blazed.

In the night beyond the bow a beam of light from the cliffs swung idly. It moved away from us, suddenly snapped back full on the *Walney*. Abruptly as it came, it vanished.

And then came a stream of bullets.

Flaming tracer lead arched out lazily before the ship. And

then the sound of stuttering machine guns. Heavy crashes came from the shore and the *Walney* shook. A moment later she shook again. We were being hit with cannon.

"Turn out!" a voice commanded.

The *Walney* wheeled sharply to the right and a momentary burst of light from the cliffs caught her. And then she was free, the night was still again.

"The *Hartland* . . . is she following?" Peters asked.

"Yes, sir," a seaman said.

Peters was saying something to Meyrick. I couldn't make out what it was. Then I heard Meyrick call: "Turn her . . . we're going back!"

In that moment Peters had made his decision and the orders were being carried out. He was going to send the *Walney* and the *Hartland* and the launches with their six hundred men into a harbor of death. To the mystery of the *Walney*, he added the final mystery of why he did it. . . .

We had to break that boom. We had to get inside the harbor and seize ships and shore batteries.

Meyrick passed an order to the men below:

"Lie flat for crash. We are approaching boom."

We braced ourselves against the devilish symphony of machine-gun and artillery fire. Our tommy guns began talking back.

Shells and bullets crashed into us, and almost as the *Walney* shuddered with the impact, she snapped the boom. We were through. It had been as easy as that.

But in another moment there was a second grinding crash. We'd struck and splintered one of our launches. And then shore gunners really got our range.

Up in the forward turret Mike died in a flash of high explosives. The next shell crashed into our engine room. Our power was gone and we were drifting. For a minute we drifted unmolested in sudden quiet. It was the turn of our sister cutter. She was in a deluge of fire.

The *Hartland* swept toward the harbor. At first, in complete darkness, undetected. Then the searchlights caught her and the shells came roaring in. But she bucked the fire and drove forward.

At the critical moment of passing the boom her skipper was struck in the eye by shrapnel. Another piece shattered his arm.

Blinded in one eye, he leaned into the glare and burst of shells and looked for the gap.

He missed it by a few feet. Full-tilt, the *Hartland* crashed into the breakwater. From there she backed off. Wrenched horribly and plastered by shells she came on again; and with her captain still there on the bridge she went through the break in the boom.

But she was a dying ship. The wounded, the dead and the dying were piled high aboard her. She was beginning to burn.

The captain put her in near the dock, according to plan. Shells still plopped into her and bullets raked her sides.

And then she blew up.

But most of her personnel got ashore.

The *Walney* drifted slowly past a floating dry-dock. For a second I saw part of the breakwater wall and in the glare could read three printed words, "La Belle France."

We dropped our commando troops. Then came the most incredible moment of the whole attack. Our chief of staff, good old Duncan with his six-guns strapped to his belt in high Western cowboy holsters and a tommy gun under his arm, stood there on the bridge waiting for his moment.

The skipper turned and said, "All right, let them have it." The guns on shore began to fire again, but our chief of staff took his hands off the butts of his six-shooters, gripped the loudspeaker microphone and began talking to the French on shore in their own language. He even spoke French with an American accent. "Cease firing," he said. "We are your friends. We are Americans. Cease firing."

It seemed to me then that all hell broke loose around us. We

were hit time and again. The chief of staff was a brave man. His voice went on amid the awful noise of battle until he fell against the microphone with his six-shooters still unfired in their holsters.

Everything was happening at once. The officers below decks began directing American assault troops to midships, where they were partially screened by the superstructure as they went over the side. A shell hit one of our fuel drums, spreading liquid fire along the deck. A destroyer loomed in front of us. We tried to ram but missed, and there was a savage burst of fire from its guns at almost muzzle-end range. The bridge was raked and raked again.

A French cruiser began firing, too, and then a submarine on our port side opened up. My crutches were knocked away in the first crush of falling men. I fell and crawled to the outside wing bridge in an attempt to see. Shell bursts wounded me in both legs. The *Walney* caught fire below deck.

Pimms, the navigator, died on the bridge.

I could see only a dull red glare and one man moving on the bridge. It was the skipper. "Who is it?" he shouted. I told him and he shouted something but I never heard, because we got another direct hit. I don't think the captain moved after that, but behind me, sketchily, I could hear another voice shouting. It was Lieutenant Cole, who had been worried about his wife. He was swaying like a tall, slim wraith on the smoky rear of the bridge.

"Okay!" he was shouting. "Everybody get off! Get ashore!" Somewhere below our depth charges began exploding. "Everybody ashore!" Our ammunition began blowing up. I never realized until hours later that he was shouting all the time directly against a blank wall.

A shell exploded inside the sick-bay directly below, killing, among others, Fuller, who was operating on the wounded. The British doctor was dying from a shell burst in the wardroom. He was also hit while operating.

I suddenly wondered in a brief flash what had happened to the soldier we had fished from the water and put in the hospital section. Out of the frying pan was right!

In the darkness bodies had fallen against me; and the bodies had risen and fallen again and again. I had somehow lived through it so far. Somehow I had managed to get up each time I had fallen. I never thought that the others hadn't. Then the realization that men were dying all around me hit me with shocking force.

I remembered then that Duncan had sagged against me, going down. I remembered that he hadn't fallen as a man falls who is thrown off balance—muscles stiffened. His body had been strangely soft.

Bracing my back against a bulkhead, I helped a wounded man—I don't know who it was—into the ladderway to the sick-bay. Then I got down on my knees and began searching for Duncan.

Seconds . . . minutes? I'll never know.

My hand found a body which was soft and yielding. Then the night exploded again. It went apart in sheets of flame. It was splitting, blasting. Shells were dropping into the bridge, exploding. Shells were hurling metal, tossing bodies. Bullets cut through the sides in red streams. All hell had engulfed the *Walney*; and what had gone before was as nothing.

At the end of the harbor the warships had waited for the *Walney*. In the darkness, she went among them, and to her death.

She was caught from three sides—submarines, destroyers, and the cruiser. Shore guns opened on her again. Machine-gun bullets raked her anew.

In the first deluge of fire I lived possibly because I was crawling. The first concussion of shells caught me and tossed me. The blasts were so loud they hurt and seemed solid.

I was tossed . . . and I crawled. I pulled up . . . was hurled down.

The flames from below were erupting into the bridge above.

Dense smoke and fumes were filling the structure. It seemed I was the only living person moving.

I crawled to the starboard wing. Smoke hung densely over the ship. Some fire was blazing below me and in its glare I saw a piece of broken, floating wreckage. I could see nothing else. I lifted the colonel's pistol and slowly fired shot after shot at the wreckage. I can't explain that action. It just seemed the thing to do, then.

When the *Walney* passed from the lull to the cannonading, Marshall and Cole stood up in the face of cannon fire and replied with steady bursts of tommy-gun fire. The rattle of their guns added to the roar on the bridge.

Marshall died as he stood hurling grenades toward the ships.

His men, crowded tightly in the crew mess-deck below the bridge, were caught by shells which sliced through the plates and burst among them.

Officers turned the remaining men to mid-ships and sent them one by one across the deck to the water. Screened partly by deck fittings, they still died, one out of every four who tried to get across.

Lieutenant George Lawrence, of Cadiz, Kentucky, a classmate of Cole's at the University of Kentucky, was killed as he swam. And so died Lieutenant Charles D. Buckley of Princeton, New Jersey, and Lieutenant James C. Browning of Bowling Green, Kentucky. Lieutenant Wales was hit and wounded seriously.

The attack on Oran had turned into a massacre.

Troops riding below decks aft had also been caught by shell bursts. In the great majority, they were dead or dying. A great hail of lead swept across the quarter-deck, sweeping it clean.

In Peters' cabin stood six men listening to the crash of the shells. A shell hit there, too. The first man killed had been the last man chosen to leave with his marine detachment from the United States—Private Robert Horr of Rhode Island. A few seconds later, Private James Earheart, Jr., also died.

One boarding party went into action crouched in a boat slung

to the side of the *Walney*. A shell hit the little boat, throwing the men into the water.

The cruiser-type destroyer was now in action. It moved slowly past the *Walney*, raking her. It moved so close that Captain William R. Turnage of El Dorado, Arkansas, who stood at the stern, could yell across to her. He saw her pass on toward the mouth of the harbor.

There was a triple crash of shells overhead. The blast caught me, hurled me back into the bridge with wounds in my legs. Once more I began crawling and falling.

There was nobody else on the bridge.

I thought: I'm alone . . . Great God! I'm alone!

Then from the bridge behind me appeared a figure. Bumping so near he could touch me, a voice yelled:

"Is that you, Captain Peters?"

"No," I answered. "It's Disher."

He started to say something else. A shell exploded near us. Once again I was flat on the deck. I must, then, have been knocked unconscious, for when I was thinking again I was crawling in the blackness over bodies, over glass and pieces of metal. And as I crawled, I thought . . . this is it . . . this is the end . . . the end . . . the end . . .

Meyrick, behind me, was dead.

So were the lookouts and the helmsman.

Peters had been knocked into the water by a shell and had been hit in the shoulder by a bullet.

I dropped to my knees again and began crawling behind the bridge toward the port ladders. I reached them. They were swept by flame but I went down. I went down one, then the other. I was on the main deck. Pushing my helmet from my head, I toppled through a shell-torn gap in the rail to the water.

I almost drowned.

The life-tube on my chest had been burst by shrapnel. The one John Cole had tied to my leg was still intact, and my leg

floated, while my head stayed below water. Struggling and choking, I pulled at the tube, finally tearing it loose. I began swimming away from the ship while bullets and bits of metal rained down on the water.

Somehow I was not hit. Foot by foot, I swam on, conscious now of pain in my legs. In the red glare which seemed to move as I moved, I finally saw a ship, and running down the ship was a hawser. To the rope clung three men from the *Walney*. They showed wet and ghastly in the glare of the burning cutter, while the water around hissed with the impact of bullets and metal fragments.

I looked back at the *Walney*, expecting to hear the final explosion any moment. She was dying, fearfully, shuddering with explosions. I thought that in one red flash I could see the Stars and Stripes still flying from her stern. She went down that way. She never struck her colors.

With infinite weariness I swam into the blackness between a lurching merchant ship and the pier. My eyes closed. My fingers clawed water. I touched a rope and discovered I was again determined to live. I hauled myself up until I got my elbows over the pier rim. Then the full weight of the cast on my leg caught me and I knew I couldn't make it. Slowly and painfully I began losing my grip. Then a single hand groped down and braced me. I swung my good leg up and it caught. Then the hand from above began to pull, and I rolled over the edge with open, gasping mouth pressed against the stone surface of the pier. I could see the man who had pulled me up as a hazy, unreal figure swaying near me. But I saw enough. He had used only one hand because the other had been shot away. I never knew his name, never even knew his nationality, because just then a bullet struck my injured foot. Another bullet later hit the wall and bounced into my temple. I was crawling, sprawling into the dirt, crawling again.

A French patrol eventually passed. I called out: "Wounded

... here." There were seven or eight of us huddled wet and wounded in the dirt against the wall. One man was groaning, half gurgling.

The Frenchmen stopped, looked toward us, and there was a rattle of weapons. One of them flashed on a light.

"Wounded," I repeated. I thought they didn't understand me. I thought they were going to fire on us.

The French came over and, behind the light, peered down at us. Some of the men struggled to their feet. The Frenchmen searched them for weapons. Then they began moving us away.

I swung along on my right foot, with one arm over the shoulders of a French soldier and the other around a man from the ships. We stopped every fifteen or twenty feet so I could rest. In this fashion we crossed a hundred yards of open space with explosions sounding in the night around us.

Finally, a French soldier took me over his back like a sack of meal and carried me into a hole in the cliffs. The hole led on, became a corridor, then a system of corridors. French soldiers, some of them wounded, stared silently. The tunnel, at the end, led to a space where doctors worked in bright, glaring lights.

I saw then that the man from the ships who had helped carry me had a bullet wound in his shoulder.

They put me on a stretcher. They carried me back to the tunnel mouth again and placed me on the ground and waited for an ambulance. It was just getting light—the first light of dawn. A light rain had begun to fall. Below me, there in the half-light, I saw ships flaming, burning in the harbor.

Groaning, wet and bloody men were placed in the ambulance. We rode through the streets of Oran and came to a winding road on a hill where we were transferred from the ambulance to an open-bed truck. Natives gathered around us, staring curiously, shaking their heads as they saw the gaping wounds, blood and tatters. A British seaman with his leg almost shot off cursed them in a fine Yorkshire accent.

In a long hospital ward, a French nurse stuck a cigarette be-

tween my lips and a doctor found a total of twenty-six assorted holes in me. I tried to sleep but the hospital shuddered to the roar of big guns.

In the next bed the American soldier who had helped carry me woke up and grinned. "Ain't it," he asked, "a helluva day?"

Our first meal came in buckets carried by an orderly who left hunks of dark brown bread at each table. Soup and mashed beans were served in tin plates. Black wine came in tin cups.

Sometime next day, a man across the aisle died, shouting deliriously.

A retired French naval officer came into the ward, listened to the sound of guns coming nearer. "Very soon we will be your prisoners," he said.

Sometime in that interval doctors came, leading the soldier who had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. He didn't have a scratch on him, but wouldn't or couldn't talk.

Word of the number of casualties was passing around, and survivors learned that the young lieutenant who had worried about his wife having a baby was lost, and that the kid from Kentucky had been machine-gunned to death in the water.

Later we could hear machine guns firing beneath the window and tanks rumbling into the streets. Then there was a sudden flurry among the French in the ward.

An American Army sergeant came through the doorway and paused. His head was bandaged, his battle-dress covered with mud. He walked unsteadily, but his ugly mug was sweetened by a smile of triumph.

All over the ward Americans began sitting up excitedly, but one fellow with a busted shoulder was the first to realize what had happened—that it was all over at Oran.

"Hey, Sarge!" he shouted. "Great God, Sarge! Come here!"



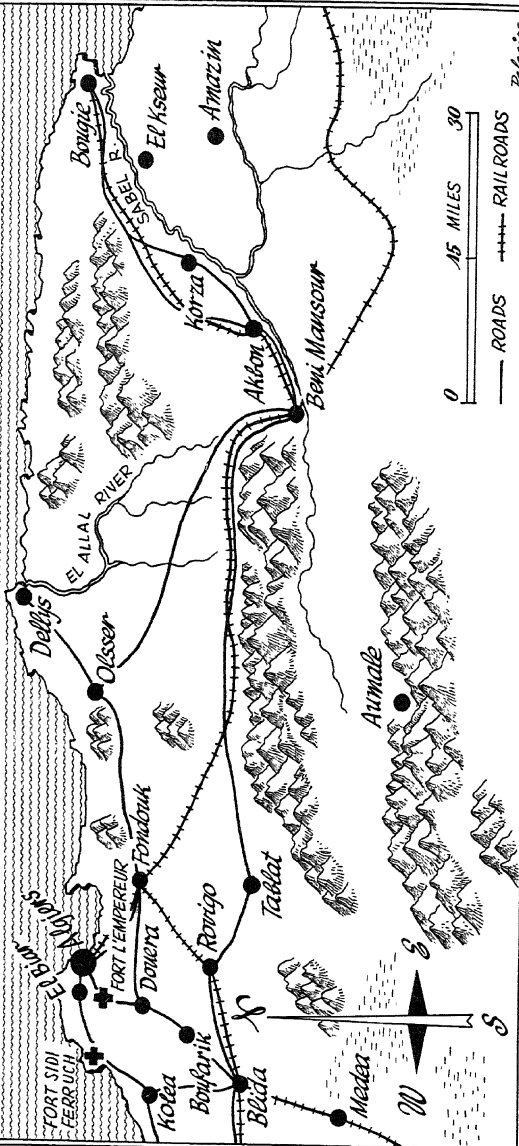
PART III

*ALGIERS*

*By Ned Russell*

# ALGIERS

*Mediterranean Sea*



*Palacios*

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

BILL STONEMAN of the Chicago *Daily News* pointed to a dot on the map just fifteen miles west of Algiers.

"I think our best bet," Stoneman said, "is to accompany a commando in the assault on Fort Sidi Ferruch. How does that appeal to you, Russell?"

Who was I to argue with Stoneman? This was old stuff to him. He is one of the top-notch reporters of all time.

"Sounds swell," I said.

"All settled then. We'll go in there. Should see some action. Likely to get a good story."

For seven days—ever since the operational plans had been made known to the troops—we had gone over them carefully, studying them for the various possibilities for news stories. And now just a few hours before we were to go ashore we had decided definitely on the spot we wanted to land.

We were aboard a British troopship, a comfortable, smooth-sailing passenger ship which had been stripped of most of its more luxurious fittings to accommodate about 3,500 troops, mostly American. They were members of a combat team of General Ryder's division, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Stewart T. Vincent. But there were also several hundred British commandos of the "right half" of the commando, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Tom Trevor, who was to turn out to be one of the best officers of the British First Army. Specially picked Americans were attached to the commando unit. They were Rangers, the tough boys of Uncle Sam's armed forces.

The Algiers landing was to be the only one in the African expedition in which British soldiers were to be involved. This was because there were not enough Americans available for the job and because the British First Army, virtually all British in

its opening makeup, was scheduled to make the first thrust toward Tunis.

The whole week before the Algiers landing had been devoted to intense study of plans for individual phases of the attack. Maps, models, aerial photographs, and intelligence reports. All these sources of information were studied and re-studied in every detail.

Stoneman, being a fluent linguist and speaking French easily but with a strong American accent, agreed to carry a portable loudspeaker and address the troops defending Fort Sidi Fer-ruch in an effort to persuade them to surrender without a fight or with the least possible bloodshed.

He went over his speech once more before we went ashore.

"We come as friends," he rattled away. "We are Americans. We come as friends. We have come to drive the Germans and Italians from North Africa. Any resistance on your part will be criminal as well as futile. The entire American fleet is lying just off shore ready to turn its guns on you. Oran has fallen."

Stoneman finished. "What do you think of it, Neddy?" I said it sounded okay to me. He grinned. "Let's hope it works," he added.

"Think I'll go out on deck and get a little sun," I said. "May be the last time I'll have a chance to relax." I also wanted to observe the reactions of the American and British soldiers on this eve of what might be a bloody battle.

Most of the British soldiers had been "under fire" before in France and Norway or in raids along the western coast of Europe. Too, they had been in the army three years and were thoroughly attuned to the idea of killing. They were tense and keyed to fighting pitch, like a boxer about to enter the ring. They were supremely confident, because they had fought Germans successfully and they knew the French could not be as efficient and ruthless and well-equipped as the Germans, particularly after two years of idleness.

The only qualm they felt—and it was very deep in most of

them, I noticed—was the fact that they might shortly be killing Frenchmen.

"Even if they fight us as hard as they can," said a British Tommy, "it couldn't be like killing Germans. I like killing Germans, but a Frenchman . . . hell, we fought with them for a long time and, well, it just can't be the same."

But most of the Americans presented a different picture. None of them had ever fired a shot in anger. Their war experience had been restricted to maneuvers and "blank" bullets and shells at home and in northern Ireland or England or Scotland. They had never even experienced heavy air raids. The idea of death was something which had occurred to them only incidentally when they had joined the army, but it had never seemed quite so imminent as now. They had talked boldly of how they would "mow down the Huns," but that was back home when they gathered around the corner drugstore or when they first started learning the manual of arms in military training camps. They seemed less worried about being wounded or being killed themselves than about killing someone else. The thought of killing a man they had never seen and who meant nothing to them personally was rather disturbing.

I looked forward to the landing with less foreboding, because, as a war correspondent, I was a "legal non-combatant" and could not carry a weapon. The idea that I might kill someone didn't enter my mind. And the possibility that I might be killed or wounded seemed very remote.

My own emotions reminded me of the days when I had waited to walk onto a tennis court ten years before back home in the States and in England. I was always nervous before a match, but this nervousness always disappeared when I started to play. I expected my present nervousness to vanish as soon as I set foot on the beach—or maybe, with luck, when I scrambled into the assault boat.

I walked back to the dining room where Stoneman was talking with Colonel Trevor.

Last-minute intelligence reports about Fort Sidi Ferruch were conflicting. We knew there had been many months of elaborate fifth column work designed to make the landing as easy as humanly possible. However, two nights before the landing, the commanding officer of our party had received a report warning that French marines were supposed to be manning the fort's guns, including four seventy-fives and several machine guns. Of all the French forces, those linked with the navy could be expected to put up the most ferocious resistance.

It looked like the Anglo-American force was in for a tough and probably costly battle, because it was supposed to neutralize the fort within half an hour or the whole time-table might be disrupted. The fort, built in 1830, lay on a tiny point and commanded two beaches to the north and south where the main forces were to land. A moat thirty feet wide surrounded the fort, but intelligence reports said there was no way of flooding it. The fort was believed to be occupied by about a hundred Senegalese troops, according to a fifth columnist who had been in Algiers a few weeks before. The bridge across the moat was a permanent fixture—not a drawbridge. The fort was designed to repel just such an assault as we were planning. It was sunk on high ground to escape direct bombardment from the sea. The deep moat had been designed to prevent direct assault by infantry, but the commandos were equipped with scaling ladders and were prepared to climb the walls on these. The one bright and hopeful aspect was the theory that the crews of the four naval seventy-fives were exposed at least to mortar fire and possibly to grenades—if we could get close enough to the fort.

Similar attacks were planned by another combat team and other British commandos on forts commanding the bay and harbor of Algiers.

Stoneman and I were sitting in the officers' lounge sipping orange soda-pop with Colonel Trevor and Captain John Bradford and Captain John Craven. I was to accompany Bradford's "troop" and Stoneman was going along with Craven. An orderly

came in and handed Trevor a message. He read it carefully and then passed it on to the rest of us to read. It was signed "CINC"—General Eisenhower—and said that the latest reports indicated we should expect a "friendly reception" at Sidi Ferruch.

The colonel puffed his fine old briar and stroked his black mustache. He looked very serious for his thirty-one years. General Eisenhower had ordered him not to fight unless he deemed it absolutely necessary. This presented an extremely delicate position for Trevor with his soldiers. He thought for a moment and then ruled that everyone should adopt a policy of hoping for the best and expecting the worst.

"Don't shoot," he instructed his men, "unless they show very definite hostility. Don't start firing simply because some odd sentry fires at you. Wait until you are positive they intend to fight."

The colonel realized this was a difficult order to expect his troops to follow, especially the less experienced, but it seemed the only possible solution to a military problem which had a lot of diplomatic angles to it. Obviously, the work of the fifth column was extremely "fluid" in the last moments before the zero hour.

The evening meals—dinner and a late supper—were arranged for the troops making the initial assault.

After dinner Stoneman and I went to a cabin shared by Bradford and Craven for a drink or two of whiskey. Bradford had saved it for just this moment.

We all laughed and joked, however, a bit tensely.

"To tomorrow's sunrise," Bradford said, raising his glass.

We lifted our glasses and drank. I wondered where we would be the next dawn. The orders called for the main striking force to be on the heights overlooking Algiers at 6 A. M., but I knew full well that few military operations as big as this one ever went according to plan in every detail.

But there was little time for fun. We downed a last drink and moved off to make final preparations. Stoneman's heavy loud-speaker apparatus had to be strapped to his back, to make sure

that it fitted properly. We dabbed our faces and hands with a foul-smelling bluish ointment which provoked a lot of obscenity from the boys. We packed our special forty-eight-hour emergency field rations, water sterilization pills, first-aid kits and morphine needles.

I packed my things into a musette bag and jammed it with extra chocolate bars, cigarettes, notebooks and pencils so there would be enough for Stoneman in case things went wrong and we found ourselves unable to get food or writing materials for several days.

It was a weird-looking group that entered the officers' dining salon for the last meal aboard ship. No one was hungry, so we turned down the offer of bacon and eggs and just drank black coffee and ate bread and butter. There didn't seem to be any need to discuss the night's operations. We all knew every detail by heart. It was difficult to think or talk about anything else, however.

We marched out of the dining salon, grabbed our kit, and went below decks to join the soldiers. They were sitting on long wooden benches or lying on long tables between the benches.

The room seemed hot and stuffy, but that was probably because we were dressed in heavy clothes for the cold ride in the assault boats.

All the forebodings of imminent battle had disappeared in the excitement and fun of applying black-face make-up. The Americans seemed especially enjoying themselves, making up their faces with fantastic designs, such as they had seen in paintings or in the movies of American Indians.

As we entered their quarters, the sergeants ordered a final check-up on all guns and ammunition. Junior commanding officers addressed the men briefly, giving them words of encouragement and a mild sort of "fight talk." There was an exchange of shouts such as "good luck" and "don't let anybody give you a wooden nickel." Then the troops shuffled into line and marched

to the assault boats which were suspended over the side of the ship by big derrick-like hooks attached to the top deck.

At exactly 10:30 P. M., as the convoy slid into position some miles off the coast of Algiers, the cables securing the assault boats began creaking and we were lowered into a calm sea. There was a faint whirring of motors starting up and the small, flat-bottomed craft slipped away from the parent ship and headed for a rendezvous with a British warship which was to guide us within four and a half miles of the shore.

The movement of the boats stirred the smooth, now black waters until there was a mild swell, rolling just enough to make the boats toss and pitch quite heavily. For more than an hour the boats maneuvered in the darkness trying to find their proper positions in relation to the warship. There seemed to be a good deal of confusion and I wondered whether this delay was going to throw the time-table off schedule. The rolling and pitching of the boats was beginning to make many of the men sick. Some of them were vomiting and groaning softly, but none of them whimpered. They knew they didn't have long to wait.

Just before midnight, the miniature convoy of assault boats finally found their positions and headed for shore, the warship leading the way. About four and a half miles off shore, the warship turned away and headed back toward the parent ship. A motor launch took over and guided us to within a mile of the beach.

I glanced at the illuminated face of my watch. It was 1 A. M.

We rolled forward cautiously, straining our eyes to see land. Off to the east, the beam of a coastal beacon swept slowly back and forth. Slightly farther to the east, the light of Algiers cast a halo-like haze over the city nestled there against the slopes of the hills that form a semicircle around the harbor.

Suddenly, my boat began to roll violently as the engine, scarcely audible, stopped and started again. I knew we were about to hit the beach. I stood up and saw the dark outline of

the beach with tiny waves splashing on it. That strange phosphorescent tinge which I had noticed from the ship made the splashing water look as if an electric light were hidden beneath it.

The soldiers shuffled quietly in the boat, adjusting their packs. One big fellow, sitting near the front of the boat, took a firm grip on his "weapon"—a twenty-five-pound box of amonol. Just enough explosive to blow open any door in the world, no matter how strong. This little tin box was going to open the door of the fort, if we could get there undetected and if the garrison refused to surrender quietly.

It was 1:10 A. M.

Bradford whispered, "The curtain's going up, fellows. Get set."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE beach just west of Algiers somewhere in the vicinity of Fort Sidi Ferruch was dark and lonely.

It was 1:10 A. M.

We were about fifty yards off shore now and the front gate of the landing boat, which served as a ramp, was lowered gently. The navy had promised to put us into water only "up to your knees—so you won't get too wet in the cold night air."

When it came my turn to jump I was so intent on keeping my footing and not stumbling over some rock that I failed to look carefully at the soldiers already in the water to determine how deep it was. I was also trying to prepare myself for the shock of the cold water without howling. Gritting my teeth and holding my breath, I jumped. The water was indescribably cold. I went deeper and deeper until I wondered if I had jumped into a hole. Then my feet struck the sandy bottom. I was in water up to my chest, and so was everyone around me.

It was vitally important that we get out of the water and onto the beach as fast, and as quietly, as possible. No one spoke. We just waded as fast as we could, trying to splash as little as possible.

A large house loomed ahead just there on the beach. It had a wide front porch and thin pillars. It was massive and stood overlooking the beach. It was dark. There was not a crack of light any place.

I couldn't recall seeing anything like this on the model we had worked by or in the aerial photographs of our particular beach. We obviously were on the wrong spot. I wondered if machine guns would suddenly start blazing from the windows of this ghostly mansion. And then I consoled myself with the thought that the house was only made of wood and was probably so fragile it could be blown to pieces with a couple of hand grenades.

Bradford led us quietly up a steep, sandy incline where he whispered to the thirty of us to gather around him.

"We're about a mile off our mark," he whispered. "We'll have to go hard and fast to catch up with the others and get into our positions."

We set off at double-quick time. Bradford, with a quick glance at his map, had pin-pointed our positions. In a moment we were on a dirt road that everyone recognized from the photographs and the model. Now every man knew our position exactly. The model and the photographs had become a reality.

Then our first important landmark, a little church, loomed out of the darkness. We knew that the fort was only a few hundred yards beyond.

The fast march was taxing my breath and I realized that I was in no physical condition for this sort of work.

Our little column halted suddenly at the side of the road, near a cluster of cactus.

"Drop everything here except your guns and ammunition," Bradford whispered. "We'll pick it up later. We are just about there."

I dropped my musette bag and a spare radio battery which I had brought along for Bradford at the last moment. It was an awkward thing to carry and I was glad to get rid of it. We moved forward again, more stealthily this time because there was the danger of bumping into a sentry or someone who might cry out and warn the garrison. We were within shouting distance of the fort. Our next objective was a line of barbed wire surrounding the grounds of the fort.

We stopped again just before the fort. There was a high mound of earth between us and the fort. I knew that mound well, from the model. I had made elaborate plans in my mind for crouching behind it when we blew open the front gate of the fort.

Then I noticed a light go on in the fort, as if someone had turned on a lamp in a room without a black-out. There had been no sound from the other troops.

Bradford was examining the barbed wire, debating whether to cut it or climb through it, when suddenly a voice roared from the fort. It was inhumanly loud.

"For Christ's sake, don't shoot!" it commanded. "The fort is ours. Come on in."

The voice was Stoneman's and he was shouting, much more loudly than necessary, through the loudspeaker with which he had hoped to persuade the defenders of the fort to surrender.

Bradford leaped through the wire, stepping carefully on the strands to avoid cutting his legs, and we all plunged after him. We ran madly around the mound of earth, along the dusty drive and over the bridge into the fort. The gate, which we had planned so carefully to blast to ruins, was wide open. The lights of the fort were ablaze.

The huge rooms inside the fort were cold and damp from the night air seeping through the stone walls and the open windows. French Senegalese soldiers were swarming around Stoneman and Craven and a few British soldiers. Everyone was grinning and chattering excitedly in French and English or pidgin combinations of both. The Senegalese were exchanging their bad, loosely

packed cigarettes for British and American fags and examining the weapons and uniforms. The Senegalese seemed extremely proud to have surrendered to "the Americans." One or two of them, looking carefully at British or American rifles, tried to imitate the British style of presenting arms but had to be shown how to do it properly.

Bradford and I were completely baffled by this *fait accompli* which Stoneman and Craven had achieved. Bradford had led us to the barbed wire and we were about to sneak up to the fort and blow it open with our high explosive charge when the whole battle ended before it started.

We were confronted with a scene that looked like a lot of old friends gathering for the first time in months. We were supposed to have been the first ones at the fort and we wanted to know how we had been beaten there.

Stoneman and Craven were proud of their conquest and made no effort to conceal their feelings from us. I asked Stoneman what had happened.

"Where in the hell have you been?" he asked, laughing. "Jeez, you're soaking wet. What happened?"

"Never mind what happened to us," I said, a little embarrassed that I was so wet and he was so dry. "The navy landed us on the wrong beach, in water up to our chests, and we've been running like hell all the way here, trying to catch up with the schedule so you fellows wouldn't get caught by yourselves."

Stoneman grinned. "We got dumped right on the spot we wanted," he explained. "We were coming up over the slope when we ran smack into a French officer and a couple of French soldiers. We got scared as hell and thought the great battle of Sidi Ferruch was about to start before we were anywhere near position. And then the French officer said, '*Amis, amis*. Welcome. We've been waiting for you. Come on in.'

"Jesus Christ, what a victory!"

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE conquest of Algiers had begun without firing a shot—a great tribute to the American State Department agents who had organized the fifth column and paved the way for the landing.

It was now about 2 A. M., and we realized it was vitally important that we notify General Ryder, aboard the headquarters ship, of the bloodless surrender of the fort. It meant that the rest of the troops who were scheduled to land on the beaches to the north and south of Sidi Ferruch could come in without fear of opposition.

But the first serious hitch in the operation occurred at this point. We could not contact the headquarters ship on our portable radio set. Repeated efforts by the radio operator failed to produce anything more than loud scratching and static. His radio had gotten wet in the landing and it simply would not function. The elaborate plans for the landing, through some simple oversight, did not provide for any emergency signal to announce the fall of the fort. We had several signals for ordering Fleet Air Arm planes to bomb the fort and for the navy to shell it. But there was nothing, except radio, to announce its fall.

During this confusion, a small, middle-aged, trim Frenchman wearing the neatly tailored uniform of a general, drove into the fort with several other officers, and introduced himself to Colonel Trevor as General Mast, commander of Fort Sidi Ferruch. He extended a warm welcome to the landing forces and made it clear that he was on our side. He showed us a copy of his order to the troops of Fort Sidi Ferruch, telling them not to resist the American landing but to facilitate it. And then he noticed that Colonel Trevor was not an American.

Colonel Trevor is a tall, powerfully built man, with wavy black hair and a black mustache, which is just as wavy. His

American steel helmet and the black-face make-up dabbed on his face made him look very fierce. He has been in the British Army since graduation from college, and he is typical of the mild, quiet-voiced British officer who is a real killer when he is on the battlefield. No matter how hard he might try, he could never represent himself as anything but an Englishman. He didn't try very hard, either, because he knew it was futile to pose as an American.

"But where are the Americans?" General Mast asked, plainly surprised. "You are British. We've been expecting the Americans."

Colonel Trevor, towering over the little Frenchman, puffed his pipe. He was a little nonplussed at the way the "attack" had developed. Quietly and persuasively, he explained that there were only a few British troops and they had only come along to help their allies, the Americans. It was not a question of Americans or British. Both countries felt very strongly about driving the Germans and Italians from North Africa and both countries had the same ideals about the war. Thousands of Americans would be landing shortly on the beaches near-by.

General Mast accepted this explanation, but he still seemed disappointed. "Very well," he said, "but you must send troops immediately to Blida airdrome. There is no time to lose. You must send at least three hundred men. Blida must be seized before dawn." There was no doubt that he was worried lest troops at Blida should decide to resist the Allied troops.

This demand placed Colonel Trevor in an extremely delicate position. His orders had called for the elimination of a reported mobile battery of six-inch guns, and after that he was to concentrate his troops to await further orders for any special task that might develop. He had a few hundred troops under his command, and he had to garrison the fort for us as a "cage" for prisoners.

"There's some question about a mobile gun battery, sir," Colonel Trevor said, stalling for time to consider his position. He knew other forces were scheduled to take Blida airdrome,

but he also knew that they could not get there until several hours after dawn.

"There is no such battery," General Mast said. "You have nothing to worry about here. But you must get to Blida. It is about thirty kilometers south of here. I will furnish you transport. I have fourteen trucks waiting now to take you there. It may be very serious if the airdrome is not taken by dawn."

Colonel Trevor was worried because he had no way to consult General Ryder and tell him of this unexpected situation. He made a bold decision. He decided to go to Blida, regardless of the fact that it was some eighteen miles beyond his area of operations. But he determined to force some sort of compromise, as tactfully as possible.

"I will take a hundred and fifty men," he said. "I'm sure that will be enough, sir. If you can have the trucks here, my men will be ready to go in an hour."

General Mast promised to have the trucks ready in an hour. Colonel Trevor hoped that by that time he could get in contact with General Ryder and obtain definite orders to meet the situation.

About 3:30 A. M., General Mast approached me and informed me that the trucks were ready. I found Colonel Trevor sitting in a small room of the fort with some French and British officers. He was peeling a huge orange. I told him the trucks were ready and it looked as if he would have to go to Blida, regardless of orders, if he was going to keep General Mast quiet.

"All right, Ned," he said. "Get the two American troops and John Craven's troops and get them in the trucks. I'll be right with you."

"Okay," I said, and turned to round up the soldiers.

"Say, Ned," Colonel Trevor called after me. "If this turns out the way I think it will, you're going to be my adjutant at Blida. Have an orange." He tossed the orange to me through the window.

In a few minutes, the soldiers were crammed into the trucks and I reported back to the colonel.

"We're all ready. Let's go and get this air field—sir." I had come along as a reporter, but Colonel Trevor had put me in a position of responsibility and I felt that I ought to try to live up to it at least to the extent of calling him "sir."

General Mast assigned a young French captain to lead us to Blida. There was considerable confusion getting the troop trucks started because they were running on benzine. The gasoline shortage in North Africa was so acute that even the military authorities had none. We had to push our little car to get it started. Colonel Trevor handed me a map and told me to make sure that our driver took us the right way to Blida. He was still worried about disobeying his original orders and he wanted to be able to retrieve any situation that might develop.

It was a harrowing ride to Blida and took us until well after dawn. Our car and the trucks behind us stalled several times and had to be pushed to get them started again. British or American soldiers leaped onto the road and challenged us to stop, brandishing rifles or tommy guns. I don't know how many times I shouted the pass-word, "Whiskey," and pointed to the American flag sewn on my left sleeve. Several times we saw American soldiers taking French civilians as prisoners. The Frenchmen, most of whom had wandered out of their homes to see what all the excitement was about, were dumbfounded when someone grabbed them by the collar or stuck a bayonet in their ribs and spoke in a language they could not understand. Colonel Trevor ordered the release of every civilian we saw being taken prisoner. These soldiers did not know that the French troops—at least those in this district—had been ordered not to resist.

We drove through several small villages, and, as daylight came, the inhabitants started to mill in the streets and squares and cheered us. There was no doubt that the people were glad to see us. They seemed to understand, without being told, why

American and British soldiers had landed in their country. Some of them probably had heard the news on their radios, heard President Roosevelt speaking from America, and had spread the word among their friends.

The young French captain took us, in one village, to a French barracks to pay our respects to a French commander. There was much stiff saluting, eager shaking of hands, and exchange of greetings. However, it seemed foolish to delay our miniature "offensive against Blida" in this way, particularly since General Mast had been so eager to have Blida airdrome captured immediately. But it probably was a good thing to do. It demonstrated our friendliness.

By the time we arrived near the Blida airdrome, there was only one truckload of Americans with us. We stopped and the French captain got out to learn what the situation was at the airdrome. He soon discovered that the French troops holding the airdrome were in no mood to surrender it immediately. The reason was clear. Someone had bombed the field and a French plane lay burning on the ground. The situation was even more delicate than we had anticipated.

The French captain met some French troops, standing angrily beside the road leading to the airdrome, and reported that there were about three hundred soldiers already manning machine-gun posts and that they were well dug in to resist any attack.

Colonel Trevor ordered four Americans to come with him. He told the others to get into a ditch beside the road and stay there until he gave them further orders.

"And don't get into any trouble with anybody," he said. "Be friendly with everyone that comes along. Give them cigarettes and chocolate."

Then he ordered the four American soldiers and me to get onto a small truck with him. The soldiers sat on either side in the back of the truck. They placed their rifles beside them so that the butts extended over the side. I handed each of them a cigarette, and Colonel Trevor told them to smoke.

"Say, Colonel," said a boy from Chicago, "got any idea where's the war?" The colonel turned around. "We may be in it up to our necks in the next couple of minutes," he replied.

Colonel Trevor and I sat in the front, with the French captain at the wheel.

We drove slowly forward, smoking calmly and looking as pleasant and friendly as we could, knowing that machine guns were pointing at us from every direction. As we approached the edge of the air field, we stopped and got out of the truck. A short distance ahead of us was a group of French officers standing in the road, obviously wondering what to do about this curious military expedition approaching them.

A French soldier, clutching his rifle, stepped forward and asked, in English, "Are you friendly?"

"Certainly, we're friendly," I replied. "We don't want any trouble. What's happened here?"

He pointed to the burning plane. "Why did you do that?" he demanded.

I assured him I was certain American planes had not done that. "Maybe the Germans did it," I suggested, although I wasn't sure. Later, other Frenchmen told me that American planes had tried to land on the field about dawn and had been fired upon. In reply they had dropped a few bombs on the field, and one had hit the plane that was now burning. The French were extremely fearful of a German air-borne landing and probably had shot before they realized the planes were not German.

Finally, Colonel Trevor and I approached the French officers, who saluted us smartly, shook hands, accepted our offers of cigarettes and chocolate, and then demanded an explanation of the bombing. We explained patiently that there must have been a mistake and, anyway, we didn't know anything about it.

"Things are going very well everywhere else," Colonel Trevor said. "We want to use your airdrome and we hope you will hand it over to us. We don't want any trouble and we are sure you don't either. We are very sorry there's been this unfortunate

incident—if by any chance American planes had anything to do with it, and it's hard for us to believe they did."

The French officers walked a few paces away and held a conference. Colonel Trevor and I, having put the four American soldiers in the roadside ditch, strolled off discreetly to let the French discuss their next step. Suddenly we saw two American boys pointing their rifles authoritatively at about ten French soldiers, standing in a group and looking slightly frightened. Their rifles were piled on the ground beside the two Americans. The colonel and I rushed over to them and demanded to know what had happened.

"We got some prisoners," one of the Americans said, proudly.

"Well, let them go," Colonel Trevor ordered. "Give them back their guns. You shouldn't have left your ditch without orders. Get back with the others." He turned to the Frenchmen, who were smiling with gratitude. "I'm very sorry this has happened," he said. "Please forgive me. It was a mistake. Here, please have some cigarettes."

The Frenchmen smiled pleasantly, accepted the cigarettes, shouldered their rifles and went back to the machine-gun post which they had been manning. The Americans returned to their ditch, mumbling something about this being a "hell of a war when you take prisoners and then have to release them right away—and give 'em back their guns, too."

Colonel Trevor and I returned to the French officers, hoping they hadn't noticed this incident. But just at that moment several American-marked fighter planes circled overhead, only adding to the tenseness of the atmosphere in which Colonel Trevor was trying to persuade the French to surrender their airdrome quietly. But their conference had failed to produce a decision.

The talks continued for nearly three hours. Most of the time we all stood on the road, chatting amiably but getting nowhere. Sometimes we sat in the ditch beside the road, smoking, munching chocolate, and wondering what our next step in the negotiations should be. Colonel Trevor held his ground, diplomatically,

making it constantly evident that he was determined to have the airdrome but that he did not want to have to fight for it.

Gradually, more troops arrived in the area and Colonel Trevor sent me to meet each truck and deploy the soldiers in a near-by farmyard where they sat quietly waiting for orders and making friends with the farmer and his family and friends who had gathered to see the excitement.

Finally, the French officers came out of one of their huddles and announced that we could have the field. "But," they added, "you must help us defend it."

We wanted to know who might attempt to seize it from us. The French argued that German parachutists might try to land. "And," they added, "we don't know what the Foreign Legion might do."

Colonel Trevor was anxious to get his troops back into their proper disposition near the coast as soon as possible. He knew that whatever troops had originally been ordered to take the airdrome would be along soon and he preferred to leave its defense to them. But the French were adamant and the colonel, relieved at getting the airdrome so easily, yielded to their demands. After a brief consultation with the French commander, Colonel Trevor deployed his troops to complement the positions of the French troops.

As a final gesture of Allied friendship, and to relieve the anxiety which the planes flying overhead were causing, Colonel Trevor decided to flag them down. The signal for identification between American and British forces on the ground and in the air was a white flag or cloth of any sort. We stood on the field and waved handkerchiefs frantically. The pilots took no notice of us. Then we got a map, which was mostly white and together we waved it. Still the pilots either did not see the signal or were skeptical. I went to the farmyard where most of the troops were sitting under trees and got Captain Craven to fire some white Very lights. Even these failed, although they burst very near the planes and well in front of them. Finally, Craven unrolled a

batch of maps and spread them on the ground to form a big "U.S." One of the pilots saw this and wiggled the tail of his plane in recognition.

The pilot, a strapping, blond lieutenant of the Fleet Air Arm, walked from his plane to the office of the airdrome commandant. He asked the commandant for a formal note of surrender, explaining that he needed it so that he could report properly to the captain of his aircraft carrier. The commandant scribbled a note on a piece of scratch paper and handed it to the young flier.

As the flier started back toward his plane to report to his carrier, I asked him why he had demanded the formal note of surrender.

"The captain of my ship asked me to get it for his scrap-book," he grinned. "I suspect he wants to tell his friends how the Royal Navy captured an airdrome eighteen miles inland. It's really only a joke, but I don't suppose anyone will mind."

## CHAPTER TWENTY

I HAD been in North Africa for twelve hours, covering two of the most important actions of the landing, and had not heard a shot fired. It was hard to believe that we could seize probably the most important section of the French Empire—and one that was of incalculable importance to Germany and Italy—without someone making at least a demonstration of an effort to stop us.

But I knew nothing of what was happening in the attack on Algiers. My next move was to join the troops near the capital, or wherever they might be. I hitch-hiked a ride on the back of a dispatch rider's motorcycle to the headquarters of a British brigade, where I learned that the French were resisting on the outskirts of Algiers.

An intelligence officer assigned another dispatch rider to drive me for the rest of the day and we headed for the "front." As we

sped along the paved roads, through beautiful, rich farmland and through tiny, dirty, white villages, I got my first full impression of the people of this country.

There were no French soldiers in the fields or villages, but the French men, women, and children were mostly overjoyed at what had happened during the night. At first, some of them were a little hesitant to express their emotions, but as they saw more and more American and British troops riding through the countryside, they realized we had come to stay. This was no hit-and-run raid. Frenchmen, with their families, stood in front of their homes or shops and waved at the troops. Some of them offered bread and wine to soldiers who stopped. It was a real gesture of friendship, because the people had very little to eat after the Germans and Italians had seized their crops.

But the Arabs presented a more picturesque and interesting scene. Dressed in filthy, flowing robes, they leaned lazily against trees or the walls of small buildings or squatted in the shade and took no more than a passing interest in what was happening around them. They were totally indifferent. The speeding military vehicles and armed soldiers dashing to the front merely furnished them with something new to look at. And as far as I could determine, it really didn't interest them very much. Soon, however, little Arab children, half naked, learned that if they stood by the roadside and shouted "biscuit" or "chocolate" some of the soldiers would give them part of their rations. A few children also begged cigarettes and then strode proudly among their friends puffing the best brands of fags from America and Britain.

As I got nearer to Algiers I began meeting more American soldiers and finally learned that there was "a helluva battle at El Biar." El Biar is a little suburb on the western heights overlooking Algiers, and it was one of the places which should have been occupied by dawn. But as I talked to more American soldiers I began to realize that the landing had not gone as smoothly as everyone had hoped.

Soldiers told of being landed off their selected beaches. The time-table had gone completely askew. Some troops had been landed five hours late. Many had become separated from their officers and their main supply dumps. The landing of trucks and other vehicles appeared to have gone so badly that many troops which had been scheduled to ride to the fighting area had walked ten or twelve miles. Communications were equally bad. I met two friends from the headquarters ship, standing in the square of a village, and looking thoroughly perplexed.

"We've got some prisoners, but we've got no place to put them," they said. "Someone was supposed to take them off our hands, but nobody has shown up. We can't leave here and we've got no way of getting in touch with our officers. Have you seen any of them?"

I told them I would do what I could to help them if I met any of their officers, but first I had to get on toward El Biar.

Just before dusk, I met half a dozen Americans climbing into a jeep and joined them. They were headed for the "front." I sent my motorcycle driver back to his base and climbed into the jeep. It was beginning to get cold as the sun set behind us and we sped toward El Biar.

The sun was down and darkness was settling fast when we drove into El Biar. We stopped to locate an officer who would assign the half-dozen Americans to their position. Overhead some planes droned in the gray-black sky and then a bomb screamed down and a great flash of red burst in the distance. We all fell flat on the ground, wondering whether the planes were Allied, French, or German. We soon learned they were Allied planes, delivering a final attack on Fort L'Empereur, controlling the western gateway to Algiers.

Fort L'Empereur had held out for about three hours, firing sporadically at the hundred or so Americans crawling among the white stucco houses and firing just as sporadically at snipers hidden in houses or behind trees or among bushes. Just after the bombing attack, the bugler of the fort sounded "cease fire" and

there was silence, an unearthly silence. Then someone fired a shot that provoked a few more rounds.

During this battle, which Bill Stoneman, who saw the whole thing, told me later was about as exciting as a "cowboy and Indian game," Robert Murphy, the United States consul-general, was driving back and forth between the lines, trying to negotiate a settlement.

The gaudiness of the sleek, black sedan carrying the American envoy between the lines contrasted with the lazy, matter-of-fact way in which the local inhabitants went about their regular life amid the whistling bullets and cracking guns. The Arabs especially refused to allow the sudden outbreak of war in their village to disrupt their routine of doing nothing. They sat stolidly on the sidewalks or in open doorways watching the proceedings. At one point, the local milkman drove his mule-and-wagon slowly through the main street of the town, just as he had done every day for years, and refused to pay any attention to the bullets flying all around him and ricocheting off the walls of the houses and shops.

Peace came to the Algiers battlefield that night, sixteen hours after the first waves of assault troops had stepped onto the beaches, and we heard for the first time that Admiral Darlan was negotiating with Murphy for terms. There were rumors that Darlan had been arrested during the early morning hours and had been released and had had Murphy seized. But it was impossible to find out exactly what was happening in the negotiations between Murphy and General Ryder, representing the Americans, and Darlan and General Juin, representing the French.

No one was allowed to enter Algiers, pending the outcome of the initial discussions, so Stoneman and I joined Colonel "Iron Mike" O'Daniel, the tough, outspoken commander of the Americans who had fought at El Biar. We found ourselves a place to sleep on the ground in a half-finished brick house with no roof, no windows, no doors and no floor. We had no blankets or over-

coats and the night was bitterly cold, with a sharp wind blowing from the Mediterranean.

The night of November eighth was the most uncomfortable night I was to spend in many months. Stoneman and I huddled together on the ground in a corner of the house, trying to escape the fiercest blasts of wind. We shivered all night and scarcely slept at all.

The next morning, the chaos of the previous day's fighting was replaced by the chaos of trying to organize the American entry into Algiers. It was not to be a "triumphal march" because we had not come to North Africa as conquerors but as friends and liberators. Stoneman and I waited around all morning to accompany the troops when they entered the city, but we finally decided we would rather get into a hotel room, have a hot bath and a shave and some good food.

We walked to a road junction on the edge of El Biar, stepped into a bus and started our own little conquest of Algiers. A Frenchman on the bus, who spoke some English, asked to pay our fare, saying that he wanted to do anything he could to make us feel at home. He gave us his card and asked us to stay with him and his family at their home, but we declined the invitation, explaining that we had work to do and we really ought to stay at a hotel.

The Frenchman took us to the best hotel in town, the Aletti, overlooking the waterfront, and bought us coffee at a sidewalk cafe. There we discovered that apparently we were the first Americans in town. People crowded around us, shaking our hands and chattering in French or broken English. We gave them the last of our cigarettes and they stood in little clusters telling us how happy they were to see us because it meant that the Germans and Italians would no longer dominate their lives. It also meant that they would get valuable and much-needed civilian supplies from the United States and Britain.

The first cool reception we got was when we took rooms in the Aletti. Most of the members of the German and Italian Armistice

Commissions had lived in the hotel, and their rooms, which they had left so hurriedly that many of their belongings were still in them, were the only rooms we might have. The hotel management was reluctant, at first, to let us have any of the abandoned rooms, probably because the hotel officials, who had done a thriving business with the Axis officials, were apprehensive lest the Germans and Italians should re-occupy the country. But we finally got the rooms and all the accompanying luxuries, including a few bottles of liquor, which wasn't very good.

We walked around the city in the afternoon and sensed the feeling of exhilaration among most of the people. Men and women formed lines in front of shops to buy American flags to hang over their homes and shops. They smiled and shook our hands and one or two threw their arms around us and kissed our cheeks. But some were indifferent. I believe those who paid no attention to the troops, who by now were marching through the streets or just sight-seeing or window-shopping, probably represented a majority of the population. They did not like this intrusion in their lives and habits, but they knew it was useless to display their feelings openly. Probably many of them had profited by the Axis domination of their country and they resented anything that threatened to change their way of life. However, the enthusiasm of those who did welcome the Allied landing and saw in it a chance to revive France and share in the defeat of the Axis generally outshone the indifference of the majority.

Late that afternoon, I drove up the winding main street of Algiers to the Saint George Hotel, a rambling peacetime resort surrounded by lovely gardens and commanding a magnificent view of the harbor, to see General Ryder or Murphy, who were conferring there with Darlan and his aides. It was getting dusk. The wind was rustling through the palms. I was sitting on a stone bench in the garden, making notes for the first story of the landing, when suddenly the purple sunset sky roared with anti-aircraft fire. Orange tracer shells leaped into the sky and

burst against the darkening clouds as a formation of about twenty-four German and Italian planes droned over the harbor area trying to smash the shipping which already was massing there.

It was a sight of spectacular beauty. The powerful concentration of guns that were blazing away at the raiders was almost equal, though on a relatively small scale, to the barrage which the gunners of London threw up during the Battle of Britain. Every ship in and outside the harbor was fighting back fiercely and there were numerous guns already installed around the harbor pouring shells into the sky. Bursts of machine-gun fire in the air showed that the Royal Air Force Hurricanes were already in the air and fighting. I saw one German plane burst into flames and plummet into the sea. I heard later that sixteen of the raiders had been shot down definitely and the rest had probably either been destroyed or damaged severely. It was a remarkable exhibition of Allied strength and probably did more than anything else to convince the wary and skeptical members of the local population that their city would be well defended against all attacks. I heard later that thousands of persons in the city below had crowded against the railings overlooking the harbor and had watched the raid and the defenses with a rising excitement which burst into loud cheering when they saw two planes shot down in the water only a few hundred yards from them.

The next three or four days were devoted to writing our dispatches and battling with the military authorities for better communications. There was also the difficult and complicated task of keeping in touch with the political situation resulting from Admiral Darlan's and General Giraud's presence. At the same time, General Kenneth Anderson's First Army, made up of ninety per cent British troops and a few isolated American units, was seizing the important ports of Bougie, Philippeville, and Bône, on the eastern coast of Algeria, and was thrusting forward toward Tunisia.

On Saturday, November fourteenth, General Anderson received about a dozen American and British war correspondents and explained, in very vague terms, his hopes and plans. General Anderson is a soft-spoken, slightly built man with a gentle but determined-looking face. He spoke confidently about how he intended to "kick Rommel in the pants as soon as possible," but warned against any assumption that the Afrika Korps, then fleeing before the Eighth Army, was as good as finished. Afterwards, he became worried that he might have presented an over-optimistic picture of the future and circulated a memorandum to the correspondents.

"I have not yet met the German and not yet achieved my aim," the memorandum said. "I certainly will achieve it, but the German is a good soldier and I expect hard fighting in the final stages."

That statement certainly proved true when the First Army, consisting then of only two brigades of infantry and a few paratroops and commandos, made its desperate, headlong lunge toward Tunis and Bizerte.

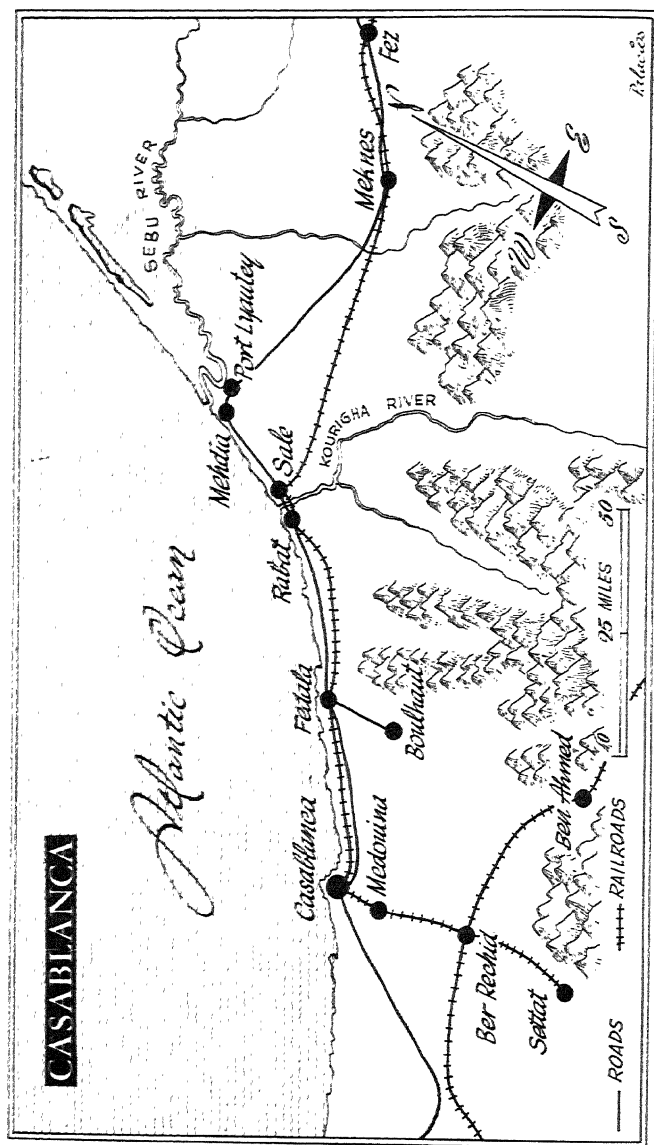
General Anderson agreed to allow two correspondents, one British and one American, to start for the front on a troop train that night. However, he insisted that all news stories from the front by the two correspondents should be made available to the other correspondents who stayed behind. He refused to let any more than two go. After a good deal of discussion, in which most of the correspondents decided they did not want to go forward immediately, when communications were so uncertain, Philip Jordan of the *London News-Chronicle* and I were selected to do the job. It was expected that we would return within a week. I didn't get back to Algiers for two months.



PART IV

*CASABLANCA*

*By John Parris*



## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE naval operations before Casablanca started at 4 A. M., November seventh.

Commander of the United States invasion fleet was fifty-five-year-old Rear Admiral Henry Kent Hewitt, who won the Navy Cross for distinguished service during World War I.

The first boat wave was supposed to leave at 4 A. M., but there was a slight delay because the ships had to be far enough from shore to escape the French shore batteries.

Let Hewitt tell the story in his own words:

"Assault boats started for the beaches at Fedala escorted by a couple of destroyers, which were necessary to guide the boats in and find proper beaches. We had two heavy cruisers disposed, one on each side of the transport area where the transports were stationed.

"Four destroyers moved in close to the shore, under orders not to fire until fired upon. Support boats were ordered to shoot at the shore searchlights if they were turned on, and that was the first thing that happened when batteries on both sides of the beaches were warned and started shooting.

"A cruiser poured in six-inch shells time and again, silencing batteries which occasionally reopened and had to be silenced again. Destroyers silenced other batteries, but some reopened later, hitting the beaches and causing some casualties among our troops before they were silenced again, quickly.

"We maintained a heavy covering force, including battleships, for the protection of the transports.

"By then, the immobilized *Jean Bart*, at Casablanca, opened up with her 16-inch guns of her single four-gun turret which was operating. Casablanca shore batteries also opened up with heavy fire and light French naval forces joined the battle.

"We returned that fire and the light forces got out of sight in the early morning darkness. We got word that destroyers were coming close along the shore to attack the landing parties, so we steamed down, opened fire and drove them back in.

"Shore batteries began shelling us and shells from the *Jean Bart* were splashing the water close by, so we got out of range. We lost all track of actual days through continuous fighting Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday.

"Later, the French came out again to attack our superior force and we had to drive them back again. They made very effective use of smoke screens in making daylight escapes.

"French shore batteries on both sides of Casablanca and Fedala were firing at us, and we constantly were seeking to silence them through bombardment and naval planes' dive-bombing.

"Earlier we bombed French submarines in Casablanca harbor. But mostly we feared the *Jean Bart*, a tough ship. We had reconnaissance report that she was knocked out, but later she opened fire with her single four-gun turret, which still was operating at the time of the armistice, despite repeated hits by sixteen-inch shells and aerial bombs.

"This action continued two days. Then Tuesday noon we sent two of our destroyers close in after receiving word that our troops, advancing toward Casablanca, were being fired on by two French destroyers. We drove them back, and one was sunk and the other badly damaged as our cruiser joined the chase.

"Then the *Jean Bart*, which was reported burned, opened up, shooting entirely too close for comfort, and we were forced to zig-zag to safety. She dropped sixteen-inchers all around us and got some near misses. In fact, I got splashed when a shell landed in the water alongside the bridge while I was watching our shell-fire. We all were drenched when the shell made a column of water rise up alongside.

"Tuesday night we were setting up the grand assault. Rem-

nants of the French navy were still firing on us. Calling in another battleship, we planned both an aerial and naval bombardment of the port, but we received word there might be an armistice ashore.

"Remember: we not only were in range of the French ships but they were using powerful shore batteries and airplanes.

"The next morning everything was all set for a terrific onslaught, but in the nick of time—just a few minutes before the order to fire was to be given—we received official word that an armistice was expected momentarily. So the order to fire was not given.

"Incidentally, French submarines were sent out before the heaviest bombardment started, but we bombed several of them, as submarines were my initial concern."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

IT WAS the "blue birds"—the crack fliers of the United States Navy—who led the Casablanca attack. And the job they did, along with the Navy—well, here are the highlights:

Guns of the great French battleship *Jean Bart* were silenced by dive-bombers rather than by batteries of the fleet.

A total of one hundred and twenty-six French aircraft were destroyed, twenty-six in the air and one hundred on the ground, in three days of fighting.

One United States carrier barely avoided four torpedoes fired by two German submarines which probably were sunk by aircraft from the carrier.

Army fighters were flown from carrier decks.

A French light cruiser and four destroyer leaders were chased aground by carrier-based aircraft.

Not one single United States airplane was lost in the battle.

On that early historic Sunday morning in November, 1942, American aircraft took off from the carriers, bombers striking at Casablanca and fighters coming in after them, strafing. Anti-aircraft fire was terrific and plentiful but inaccurate; later it improved and aircraft returned to their carriers scarred by shell fragments.

French aircraft were reported destroyed on the ground and in the air, fifteen on the ground at Medouina. Returning fighter pilots told of progress in the landing operations: at Safi, they said, the landing barges "appeared like Liberty boats plying between ship and shore."

Traffic on the flight decks was heavy. Sometimes the pilots did not leave their planes between flights. They just hit the deck, refueled, reloaded their guns, and took off again. Some of them hastily gulped cups of hot black coffee in the ready rooms while intelligence officers interrogated them.

Everyone wanted to go in the flight. One rear gunner was offered \$230 for his seat in a flight. He turned it down. On the flight he was killed by a shell fragment.

One pilot went down to strafe an airfield and put so much enthusiasm into his work that he came back with foliage tangled in his airplane. He said it was eucalyptus he had hit; he knew by the smell.

The French cruiser and destroyer leaders were driven aground that night.

Next day the airplanes were out again, protecting troops on the beaches from strafing by the French, seeking out shore batteries which were giving them trouble. They found the gun emplacements strong; near misses did no good, so the bombers went in after them and silenced them.

One French fighter had a field day strafing the beaches until it was discovered he was sneaking in at low altitude from behind a ridge. A navy air-ground liaison officer helped find him and United States fighters ended his fun.

French aircraft were active the second day and several were

shot down and many destroyed at Rabat, Cazes, and Marra-kech.

Caught by fog to the south of Casablanca, several United States planes were forced by dwindling gasoline to land at Safi. The field had just been captured by American ground troops.

French troops and tanks were discovered converging on Port Lyautey and Rabat, and the fighters went after them. Vehicles in these columns were destroyed. The navy fighters blew them to bits with depth charges, dropped from the planes. The troops left the area.

The third day was much like the second except the "pilots were getting in the groove." Battleships turned their heavy guns on Casablanca batteries, fighters bombed and strafed troop columns and took care of air opposition. Dive-bombers ignored anti-aircraft fire to blast the coastal guns.

Submarines that had slipped out of Casablanca were sighted on the surface, headed south, presumably for Dakar. A reconnaissance plane sighted a periscope fifteen miles astern of one of our escort carriers. Another was sighted far out to sea. It appeared that the pack was assembling.

The *Jean Bart* was attacked the afternoon of the third day by nine dive-bombers with 1,000-pound bombs. Though she had been hit several times by the guns of the fleet she was still firing. The dive-bombers silenced her.

The cease-firing order came early in the morning of November eleventh, and bombers on specific missions returned with their bomb racks still loaded.

During the fourth day, one of the carriers was maneuvering to launch some army P-40's when four torpedoes streaked past its stern and two more passed ahead of another. Three torpedo bombers dropped down out of the clouds and caught a German submarine crash-diving. They attacked, and oil, bubbles, and debris floated to the surface for forty minutes. A few minutes later another submarine was attacked and oil came to the surface.

The last of the P-40's was off for its land base. The navy air group headed westward.

The assigned mission of the air group had been carried out. The "blue birds" had written a new chapter to their career.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

YOUR name is Jim and you're a Yank tommy-gunner from Hot Coffee, Mississippi. You're a long way from Mississippi now, though. In fact, you're off the French Moroccan coast with thousands of other Yanks. In a few minutes you're going over the side of this boat and head for Port Lyautey. The American offensive in Africa is about to start.

"This is a helluva way to go to war," the sergeant says.

And, whether you like the sergeant or not, you have to agree with him. It's dark—pitch dark—and here, five miles off the African coast, it is cold. You've been awake all night despite the suggestion of the officers that you get a little sleep—"because you aren't likely to get much tomorrow night."

You've been sitting around the decks talking of this and that, of Judy Garland and Betty Grable and Dinah Shore's singing and the REAL girl back home and what you're going to do when the war is over. Occasionally, but not very often, you talk about the battle into which you are about to go and whether or not the French really are going to fight. Somebody says the French won't fight. But you don't pay much attention to that kind of talk.

Yet, not many of the boys think they will fight. Their tommy guns and their rifles are loaded and their bowie knives are sharpened to a keen edge, but they can't seem to get the idea that they're going to have to use them against the French.

Some of the boys have a vague notion that they are going to meet bushy-haired, big-lipped tribesmen on the African coast

and they talk about the strange sights they expect to see. They talk, too, about the instructions from the army and navy regarding the taboos to be observed in Morocco—that you mustn't look at the veiled women because of the social beliefs of the Arabs, and that you mustn't take pictures, enter or even gaze with curiosity on the native mosques. And when you talk this way you wonder in amazement at the calmness of your buddies. Here they are on the eve of battle, on the biggest offensive operation in which the United States has been involved in this war.

In six hours you and your buddies are likely to see death, perhaps feel it. The thought strikes you that we may find the French so tough that we might never reach our objective. We might find that the Spanish are going to join up with the Axis. Scores of planes and hardened Spanish Moorish troops might come down the few miles from Spanish Morocco and get in the fight. You think the Nazis might pour hundreds of Stukas into the battle. You've heard a lot about those dive-bombers.

But somehow the thoughts of danger are crowded out of your mind, and you still talk about Judy Garland and Betty Grable and the girl back home. Maybe it's because you know you're going to do this job right. You've got that old confidence.

That's what you're thinking when the word is passed down the groups of waiting soldiers that you are about to go over the side.

It is midnight now. The transports have anchored off the mouth of the Sebu River. Eleven miles up that river is the pretty little French colonial city of Port Lyautey with its five thousand French and twelve thousand Moroccans, with its broad boulevards and esplanades, with its tiny parks and long lagoons and swans, with its beautiful European women and native girls.

But the boulevards and esplanades and parks and lagoons and swans and girls are not military objectives. These American troops of the amphibious forces that will land on the beaches and these American warships that will lie off shore and these

American planes that will sweep from the decks of carriers—they are here primarily to take the airdrome that lies two miles down the Sebu from Port Lyautey, nine miles from the river entrance.

Between the beach and the airport is a hill two hundred feet high and with approaches almost like the sheer face of a cliff. The hill is a mile back from the beach—the beach you're going to hit. That means a mile of dunes and scrub bushes you can dig in before fighting your way up those steep hills in the face of enemy guns that the army and navy believe are there.

Along that ridge are four great 155-mm. naval guns capable of shelling the transports and the warships lying off shore and the landing boats coming in. And at one end of the ridge, right where the Sebu cuts through that hill, is the native Kasba, the walled city of Mehdia, built with turrets and all the battlements that the fierce and ancient Berber tribes needed to fight off invaders hundreds of years ago. Straight out of *Beau Geste* was the Kasba, but the machine guns and rifles that poked from the holes in its walls were anything but romantic to the khaki-clad American forces.

So that is the objective as the word comes down the rows of soldiers on the transports. The idle chatter stops and your thoughts turn now to war. You're green and so are your buddies, as far as actual battle goes. But you've had plenty of landing practice in hidden coves along the Atlantic coast, and you've been toughened under simulated battle conditions.

Now you and your buddies are about to put all that knowledge and all your specially trained energies to use. One by one you step from the shadows on the deck and up to the rail, heavy packs on your backs and landing equipment dangling from your belts.

You've made this sort of descent down a Jacob's ladder or cargo net to waiting boats in training operations, but no matter how many times the climb is made it grows no easier. The Jacob's

ladder is a mischievous thing at best. A few small hunks of wood tied together by a pair of parallel ropes at either end; and that's your mode of transportation down sixty feet of a ship's slanting side to the boat below.

And if you go down by cargo net the job's no simpler. Cargo nets are great webs of ropes and hawsers tied together to form a pattern of squares in which it is possible to get a foothold or a toehold.

The descent by either means is tough and treacherous from start to finish. It takes some trouble and a great deal of guts to go swinging over the side of the transport with pounds of equipment strapped to your back. The canvas belts that hold your pack and your gun and your canteen and the dozens of other things get caught on every projection of the ship's side, and you dangle with one hand clutching the rope ladder while with the other hand you try to free yourself.

You get down toward the bottom of the ladder and there's the boat. It looked so peaceful from up there on the ship's deck floating down there and waiting for you. But when you get down to it you find it's bobbing in a heavy swell, rising on waves ten feet high. It is up under your feet one second and ten feet below you the next.

You have to time your leap pretty well. If you leap too late, it's a ten-foot drop with that heavy pack and the boat deck can be pretty hard. But if you wait a second too long, the boat may come back up the crest of one of those waves and then you're in danger of getting your legs and your feet smashed between the boat and the ship.

Some of the boys hang back a bit. They let the boats bob a couple of times before they make the leap, but each time the good-natured jibes and ribs from the other fellows who are already coming down the ladder or already in the boat spur on the cautious ones.

The three-man crews of the landing boats shove off from the

transports and lay out a few yards from the ships. Soon all the boats are filled and you wait for "H" hour, the moment when you "hit the beach."

The motors of the boats are idling now, just enough to keep the landing barges headed into the swell but not so much that their combined roar will carry over the waves to the beach and warn the French garrison there.

Then you notice your motorized support being swung over the sides of the transports and cargo vessels—the light tanks and anti-tank guns, and mobile radio outfits and jeeps that will form the mechanized support for the first assault wave.

Just like the sergeant said, "This is a helluva way to go to war." You go over the side and then you sit there bobbing on the waves for maybe a couple of hours. If you're lucky you were one of the last loaded on the boat and your wait isn't too long, but you probably weren't lucky and you've been huddling in that landing barge for a couple of hours when suddenly your helmsman turns his boat and starts for shore. Then you hear the motors of the other boats coming to a full-throated roar, all set off by that same prearranged signal that swung your helmsman into action.

You are at last on the way. You crouch down under the protective side of the landing boat. A direct hit from shore artillery or even from machine-gun bullets would penetrate that armor. And anyway it's only on one side of you. You feel pretty darned exposed.

Then suddenly your boat hits the surf and you see what the sailor meant when he said this was one of the most treacherous coastlines in the world. It was calm out there at sea compared with this surf. The waves suddenly rise, wrap themselves into a great white cap of water, and plunge onward to form up again. In that maelstrom of water your tiny barge is caught. The helmsman works frantically to bring it back under control and you reach for the lifebelt under your arm just to make sure it is still there. It is. You feel a bit better.

You straighten out a second later and you venture a look over your thin metal shield. You look toward the shoreline. It's too dark yet to see. "Keep down," the sergeant whispers.

You're in the boat for almost thirty minutes after it once gets under way toward the beach, and every minute since the tenth one you've been thinking you'll hear the crunch of the boat's bottom against the hard sand and the order to move on in.

You weren't scared at first. You weren't scared waiting on the transport to disembark. You weren't scared waiting out at sea while the small boats formed their own little convoy for this first assault landing. But these minutes on the final lap of a four-thousand-mile journey to destiny have been just a little nerve-racking. But just when you are feeling your worst, some guy like the little private of Italian descent behind you takes off his helmet and gives it a critical look.

"It's a little bit crazy," he whispers in a stage voice right from Minsky's. "This helmet was the size of a washtub all the way across. Now look at it—it ain't the size of a dime."

A ripple of laughter whips through the boat and you hear the remark repeated a couple of times only to be cut short by that sergeant again. "Keep quiet," he says.

Something rips under you. You hear a grinding, grating noise, and in the same split second you realize that you are on the beach. A command and you are sliding out of the landing barge. The damnedest three days in your life have begun.

You hit the water and it's knee-deep. Some of your equipment dangles in the surf and you find yourself wondering whether it is going to be damaged instead of wondering whether you are going to be shot. You clutch your tommy gun a little tighter above your head.

Around you the buddies from your boat are wading ashore and you find a strange feeling of protection in having them near. It's still pitch black and you can barely see the dim outline of dunes on the beach. Then you discern figures crouched around the dunes and you're already bringing your tommy gun to firing

position before you realize they are American doughboys like yourself who landed a second before and already have moved into the "front line."

There hasn't been a shot yet, though. The French and Moroccans are bound to be on the other side of that beach somewhere. The silence is broken only by the roar of the landing boats and now the starting of additional engines as the motorized equipment begins rolling off the barges.

You begin to feel that maybe you are part of a ghost army occupying a deserted village, and then you begin to feel just a little disappointment because it looks as if the French are capitulating without a fight and, no matter how desirable that is, you are going to miss a taste of combat.

Any ideas you had along that line are smashed into a million pieces a second later. You are just moving in behind the sand dune that you had picked out (with the help of your sergeant) when the hell breaks loose. There's a flash of gunpowder on the hill beyond and a dull boom.

You're under shellfire, you think, and then say to yourself, This is it.

And then there isn't any crunch of bombs or shells and you realize that you aren't the target at all. You feel a little silly, lying there trying to shove yourself through that great big hunk of sand dune, and you cast a sheepish grin to the guy next to you but you find that he has dug in, too.

The big gun on the hill has tossed another shell and now a destroyer lying off shore has opened up on the French. You can hardly hear the destroyer's guns but you can see the flashes and then hear the crunch of its shells over the hills.

It's still within a couple of minutes after the first flash in the hills that you hear the rattle of small arms and machine guns on the beachhead several thousand yards to your left. That sand dune seems awfully important now and you wonder when they are going to open up on you and when you are going to answer.

Dawn is just breaking and that ridge is showing its formidable self. Then:

"Rat-a-tat-tat-tat." Five little volcanoes of sand erupt about a hundred yards away, far wide of any of your group. "Rat-a-tat-tat-tat." Five more little geysers and they are closer this time.

You start hearing voices then. Somebody asking loudly but calmly, "Did anybody see where he is?" And somebody else asking, "When we gonna let 'em have it?"

Another rattle from the enemy machine gun. The spurts in the sand are farther away from you this time but they are too close to someone.

"Oh!" Sharp, staccato, that cry. Almost the sound of a fellow getting a body blow in a boxing match. You never figure out exactly who it was that was hit. One of the boys behind a neighboring sand dune, perhaps, or one of the engineers with the tough job of bringing up the heavy equipment from the beach.

Our fire answers now. Up and down the line of sand dunes the tommy guns flash and now our machine guns are getting into action. They fire a moment, then wait for the enemy to shoot once again and reveal his position. This is tricky business. Out-waiting each other and straining your eyes in that half light for a target knowing that when you open up you're going to expose yourself.

Meanwhile, the heavy duel between the hill-top battery and our destroyer continues to add to the cacophony of war. The destroyer now has been joined by a cruiser and there are some awfully big shells dropping on that ridge. That duel is going to last two hours and then we're going to hear a crashing explosion from the hill top and the French artillery fire is going to cease.

Finally, you don't hear anything from the machine guns for a while and you figure that your guns, which have been cutting up a little patch of shrubbery up there where the dunes end and the foothills begin, have silenced the enemy. So, not quite cau-

tiously enough, some of the boys stand up and start across the dunes.

"Rat-a-tat-tat-tat." The boys drop to their bellies. Their helmets go rolling off and they reach for them frantically. You see them checking up and they all seem to be okay. So the sitting and waiting and the trading of fire begins again until another group decides the forward area is safe. This time it is and everybody moves up a few dunes.

That's the way it goes for two days, except for the variations in terrain and they aren't inconsiderable. That first day you spend on the sand of the beach and the scrub bushes of the foothills. That night you lie fitfully awake in the same bushes and munch on the "K" ration of prepared foods in your kit. The next day you're fighting up the side of the hill right up to the Kasba with its aura of mystery and romance but with its much more realistic Moroccan gun emplacements.

The third and last day you're moving down the opposite side of the hills and into the marsh land that surrounds the airport. And then the fighting is over and you want to sleep for a week but you are put to work getting the bombed and shelled airport back into shape so American fighters and bombers can put it to use.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

WHEN you record the names of Uncle Sam's fighting men on your roll of heroes, you had better put down Steve Brodie and his dingy old destroyer with all its officers and men. And put down alongside their names those of Lieutenant James W. Darroch and his six men.

Lieutenant Commander Robert Brodie, Jr., of Washington, D.C., whom all the navy calls "Steve," took eight army raiders up that hostile, shallow and narrow Sebu River to make pos-

sible the capture of the vital airdrome, principal objective of all the American forces in the sector.

Darroch and his six men helped the Brodie feat. Under cover of darkness and with machine guns and rifles spitting at them from all sides, they took a tiny landing boat to the net that blocked the river mouth and so weakened it with wire cutters that Brodie could break through. Their boat was peppered with bullets but miraculously Darroch and his men escaped unharmed.

Brodie's destroyer was listed as strictly expendable when he was ordered a month before to strip her topside of everything except essentials to lighten the load and make possible the navigation of the river, which the charts show holds hardly enough water to float the ship.

The battle had raged on the beach west of Port Lyautey for two days and twice Brodie had tried to make it up the river. Both times batteries of French 75's laid down an impenetrable curtain of fire. Tuesday of that historic week of attack was the deadline. American army planes needed the airport base and they needed it badly. The ground troops outside Port Lyautey were stymied. Only Brodie's raiders could secure the air field.

So before dawn Brodie began the treacherous advance into the river mouth through twenty-foot surf and currents that whipped the destroyer at right angles to her course. Few ships of her size ever before had navigated the narrow break-water and certainly not in total darkness without the aid of a single navigation light.

The ship threatened to dash herself on the jutting rock jetties before Brodie got her inside the river mouth to calmer waters.

Then he found that a fragment of the net supported by buoys still blocked the deepest section of the river.

"We're going to ram the net," he messaged to Admiral Monroe Kelly, waiting anxiously on his flagship outside the river mouth.

That would have been a dangerous feat in itself without these

dozen and one other complications. Anxious seconds passed without word from Brodie, and then the excited message came.

"We are through," Brodie radioed. "We are through the net."

But trouble heaped on trouble and danger on danger for Brodie's ship. Once in the river she was in a canyon with steep hills and caves overhead. The threat they promised soon materialized.

Machine guns and rifles opened up on the destroyer. A fish in a barrel would have been no easier mark. The officers and crew ducked behind the thin metal of their splinter shields but they kept their ship moving up the river. Brodie messaged cryptically to Admiral Kelly:

"We are being fired on and have returned the fire."

They returned the fire, all right. They silenced the machine-gun nest which was their principal source of irritation. Only later were Brodie's gunners to know that the shells they aimed at the machine-gun nest also had frightened away a near-by anti-tank battery that for two days had been holding up one prong of the American advance from the beach.

Meanwhile, the destroyer was having a terrible time with the shallow water. Her hull was scraping the bottom and her engines were threatening to pound their way through the ship's sides.

There was a buzz from the engine room. Lieutenant John Ferguson, Jr., the son of a retired navy captain of Coronado, California, picked up the tube.

"We are turning up near top speed," a voice yelled.

Ferguson looked over the side. They were barely moving. All the time the enemy was shooting at the destroyer and here she was crawling on her belly through the mud. The old lady threatened to stop for sure in the middle of the stream.

The old lady made it, though. And her audacity in sailing—with her colors flying from her mainmast—right into the heart of the enemy revitalized the weary doughboys assaulting the

air field in the deep, marshy mud. Similarly it furnished the final blow to deflation for the defending Moroccan troops.

Those doughboys in the mud of the north side of the air field were near disorganization. Some had lost their helmets and some had lost their guns in the slime, and they were beating their way back toward the river where they had left their rubber boats when Brodie sailed in.

"Hell, men, there's the navy," a muddy doughboy yelled. "If they can do it, we can."

The soldiers turned and headed back across the marsh toward the enemy on the air field.

The destroyer, which was now around the river bend and on the east side of the air field, put her raiders over the side. Lieutenant Quentin Hardige of Madden, Mississippi, led his men down the cargo nets into their tiny rubber boats. They paddled three hundred feet across the Sebu into the hell of Moroccan machine guns.

The combination of the arrival of the American navy right in the middle of their little river and the spurting tommy guns of the apparently fearless raiders quickly changed the minds of the resisting Moroccans.

Hardige didn't lose a man crossing the river. When his force hit the opposite bank the Moroccans came out of the airport buildings with their hands in the air.

But the battle wasn't over yet for Brodie's ship. Two batteries of French 75's east of the river opened up against the ship, their range apparently controlled by a concealed party on the roof of a near-by grain elevator. The shells came so close that one clipped the ship's aerial. Others sprayed shrapnel across her decks. The destroyer brought her guns to bear in short order, and with the help from guns of a cruiser off shore at the mouth of the river and a pair of bomber-equipped scouting planes, the 75's were silenced before they could inflict damage or casualties.

The battle was over now. The airdrome was in American

hands. It was night. Brodie's eyes were red from lack of sleep. He sipped his coffee there in the wardroom of his destroyer anchored in the Sebu. His face was heavy with stubble and his thick hair was almost matted. But he was wearing a smile and passing compliments along to the crew.

"She's a Raggedy Ann ship and a Raggedy Ann crew," he said, "but she's a loyal ship and a loyal crew. We think we helped turn the tide of battle and we're pretty-darned proud of it."

Brodie was right. His ship did have a powerful part in the battle for Port Lyautey.

You'll probably be hearing of Brodie and Darroch and Hardige again.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE marine with the busted ankle hobbled across the deck of the aircraft carrier to where four gobs in dungarees were fitting a big steel drum to the belly of a little navy scouting plane.

"Say, mate, what the hell you strapping on that plane?" the marine asked in a puzzled tone.

The Yank naval pilot looked at him and grinned. "Are you kidding? Mean you don't know what that is?"

The marine shook his head. "Got me, pal. I been a lot of places and seen a lot of things, but this sure has got me buffaloed."

"Marines are dumb anyway," said one of the gobs and grinned.

"Yeah?" said the marine bristling. "When it comes to fighting . . ."

The naval pilot interrupted.

"Take it easy, chum," he said. "This is a depth charge."

"What the hell is it doing on that plane? Going out looking for subs?"

"Naw," said the naval pilot. "Haven't you got any imagina-

tion? We're going to drop 'em on some tanks. French tanks."

"Now, who's trying to kid who," said the marine.

"It's a fact, so help me," said the pilot. "We haven't got any bombs and these are the next best things. In a few minutes we're going over there and drop 'em smack dab on some French tanks." He pointed toward the Moroccan coast, inland toward Port Lyautey. "Got to use the old bean when you're fighting a war, Marine."

The four gobs crawled from beneath the plane.

"All set," said the tall one. "You got two tin cans with enough explosives to do plenty of damage."

The naval pilot climbed into his little machine.

"Good hunting," said the marine.

The naval pilot grinned, gunned his motor and roared down the long flight deck and into the air. He circled once, low. And then headed toward the coast and the rising hills.

The marine watched the plane grow smaller and smaller in the distance until it was only a small speck in the sky. The marine was still flabbergasted.

"By God," he mumbled, "that takes the cake. Hell, I thought those things were made to sink submarines."

The naval pilot leveled off at a thousand feet and started looking for the highway from Rabat. There it was just to the left. He kicked the rudder and banked slightly until he was winging down that ribbon of white. Up ahead was a column of tanks, lumbering down the road toward Port Lyautey. He pointed his nose down and roared in upon that column.

Once, twice he pressed the button. The big steel drums shot downward. He pulled back on the stick and put his plane upstairs. He leveled off and circled over the column. Two tanks were a wreck. Three others had slipped into a ditch, damaged.

He headed back for the carrier.

The experiment had proved a success.

Other planes came out from the carrier and dropped their tin cans. In a few minutes the strong enemy column moving up to

endanger the American southern flank on the beach was thrown into disorder and laid on a silver platter for the Yank tank column which hastened down from northern beachheads.

The column was sent reeling, but during the night it re-formed and tried to come back the following day. It got to Depth Charge Junction again only to meet the same fate as before.

The naval pilots were there waiting with their tin cans.

The enemy column fell back and never was able to reorganize for another try.

In the first engagement on the Rabat highway naval scouting planes from one of the American cruisers spotted the column, directed the initial navy fire which slowed the column.

Then the naval planes dashed back to their ship and fitted their depth charges with instantaneous fuses. They returned to the fray.

The first plane got over the road and started his dive. The pilot yelled over his radio, "Watch this one, chum." Down he went. He pressed the release button. The tin cans shot down, straight to the target.

"Right on the button," a pal yelled to him on the radio.

They shattered the column.

Later, when the French attempted a large-scale withdrawal from Port Lyautey via the Meknes highway, the scouting planes were there again. They dropped their tin cans and then opened up with their guns.

The little two-seated planes, their heavy pontoons slowing them down almost to the speed of the trucks on the ground, strafed the enemy troops.

Ensign Lloyd Hollingsworth, a redhaired, happy-go-lucky lad from Wilmington, North Carolina, expended all his machine-gun ammunition in that pursuit. There was still life on the road, however, and he still had his forty-five automatic pistol.

He saw a plane from one of the escort carriers that had crashed just alongside the road. Lloyd knew a lot of guys on

that carrier and he figured it was probably one of his pals down there in the wreckage. It made him kind of sore.

"I'm going down and get me some Frenchmen," he told his radio operator, Bill Autrey.

He went down and skimmed along over the highway. He saw only one target that looked good for a forty-five. A motorcycle rider trying to run the blockade where our shells were dropping. Lloyd chased him right along the road until he had fired all the bullets in his gun.

Suddenly the motorcycle stopped weaving. It skidded on its side and the machine went smacking into the ditch.

"I don't know whether I got him or not," Lloyd yelled to Bill, "but he ain't riding no more."

Fighters and dive-bombers from the escort carriers joined the last depth-charge-tank battle on the Rabat road, but by courtesy they let the scouting plane that flushed the column take the first crack at the enemy. By the time the scout was through there was little left for the fighters and bombers.

Lieutenant Franklin Chesley of Saco, Maine, the pilot of the scouting plane, told his story back on the carrier as he drank a bottle of Coca Cola.

"We came down to six hundred feet to get a crack at that column," he said. "There were fifteen tanks there leading the column. What a beautiful target that was. Our depth charge missed the tanks themselves and hit the side of the roadway but it was so powerful that the second tank in the column blew straight into the air. The tanks on either side of it just seemed to slide gently off the road and turn over in the ditch.

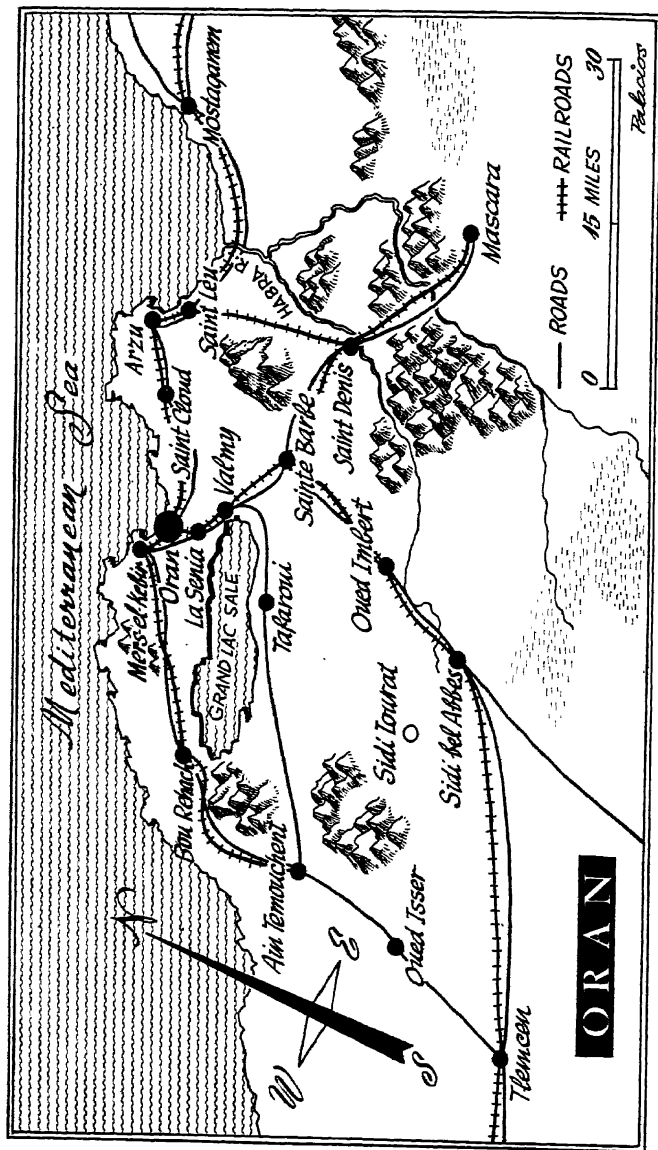
"The concussion from the explosion blew us a hundred and fifty yards into the air, so I guess it was potent enough there on the ground. That blast stopped the column and then the dive-bombers took over. They handled the rest of the tanks in nice order."



PART V

*O R A N*

*By John Parris*



## CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

NOTES from a war correspondent's diary:

November ninth—It's 6 A. M. aboard the big American troop transport off the sprawling dun-colored village of Arzu.

A blood-red African sun comes up like blazes out of the east across the sea.

The beaches have been cleared of their dead but the distant roll of heavy guns crawls across the hills to the south like a muffled whisper. Back beyond those hills where we are going there is still plenty of fighting.

I wonder what the day will bring.

6:30 A. M. We stand at boat stations waiting to go ashore. The landing barge tosses in the swelling sea far below, like a leaf being tossed by the wind.

Major Goddard rushes up. He has a big package in one hand.

"Here's fifty thousand dollars in good old American bills," he says, and tosses me the package. "It's specially printed money for this campaign.

"If we get separated," he warns, "for God's sake don't go off and buy a harem."

We board the landing barge, leaping from the ladder just at the moment a swell tosses it up ten feet. We sprawl on the floor among our gear, shaken but unhurt.

We turn away from the transport and plough across the harbor toward the breakwater. We buck the waves like a rodeo champion.

Ashore, we stand on a concrete pier on the Arzu waterfront. We watch soldiers unload supplies from the barges which keep up a running relay from ship-to-shore, shore-to-ship.

It's time to move on.

We pile into an American ambulance just as a sniper's bullet pings overhead. The sniper's up there on the hill, in the brush. A couple of soldiers start working their way around behind the hill. I wonder if they will get him. We can't wait to see.

Captain Charles Crathern of Worcester, Massachusetts, steps in behind the wheel of the ambulance, presses the starter and we roll off through the crowded streets of Arzu toward the hill village of Saint Leu.

The town square of Saint Leu is filled with American soldiers and gaudily dressed Arabs squatting on the ground under palm trees. It's hot and the flies buzz in droves. The streets are dung-littered.

The town hall has been turned into a first-aid dressing station. Two soldiers pass with a third on a stretcher.

Majors Coster, Goddard and MacClosky stand under a palm tree talking. A messenger comes over from a radio truck and hands MacClosky a message. He reads it.

"Got to send reinforcements to Tafaraoui," he explains. "A French Foreign Legion armored column is moving north from Sidi-bel-Abbès on the field. About fifty American pilots and paratroopers are holding the field. They've got eight hundred prisoners."

MacClosky hurries away to order one of our armored columns to speed to Tafaraoui.

"Want to come along?" says Coster. "Well, I suggest you hop one of those trucks over there." He points to where two trucks filled with Doolittle's air commandos are parked on the side of the road.

I pick up my gear and scramble into the truck. The commandos are packed tight in the truck but I manage to wedge myself in up near the front.

"Hope I get a chance to play this 'piano,'" says a boy from Brooklyn, patting his tommy gun affectionately.

"You will," says a boy from Jersey. "The Old Man says we're

gonna have a hot time down the road. Says we gotta bust our way through some little village where them Legionnaires are holed in."

We roll out of town at mid-morning and stop on the outskirts where an armored column is lined up ahead. We're going to follow the column.

Coster comes by in a jeep and waves. He stops a few hundred yards ahead.

Some French girls come up to our truck and the boy from Brooklyn begins talking to them in pidgin French. Finally, he makes them understand he would like some wine. They hurry off and come back with six bottles, which they pass around. The boys take a swig and say, "*Merci, merci.*"

Coster comes up.

"How would you like to ride with me in the jeep?"

"Swell." I hop down from the truck and go tearing up the road. The jeep is just back of the last tank.

"The French have blocked the road at Sainte Barbe," he says. "Looks like we'll have to fight our way through. When the shooting starts, I suggest you hop out and find yourself a ditch. We've got to wipe out that pocket and then go on to the airdrome. It may be a bloody mess."

The column finally gets under way.

The tanks kick up dust and we put on our dust-and-sun goggles. The sun beats down mercilessly. The tanks are spaced out ahead, about a hundred yards apart.

We roll along a winding road over rolling hills. The country is practically bare. There's a big dried-up salt lake on our left. Olive trees line the road.

We stop often while the scout car leading the column goes out ahead to reconnoiter. Then the signal flashes down the line that it's okay to move along again.

The country looks like the mid-west now. Sage and small brush. We keep a sharp eye out for snipers.

Outside Sainte Barbe we stop again. The scout car and one

tank go ahead. There's a road block up there. The tank plunges through. There's no sign of the Legionnaires. A friendly Frenchman tells the major in the scout car that the Legion armored column has turned around and moved south.

Our Spitfires seem to have beat us to it. The Frenchman says the Spitfires wrecked several tanks and shot up the column pretty badly.

We learn later that the Spits knocked out twenty of the fifty French tanks and shot up twenty-five troop lorries.

We roll into Sainte Barbe to the cheers of the population.

Villagers crowd around us. Coster talks to them in perfect French.

"Do you have any more tanks?" a Frenchman wants to know.

"Thousands," says Coster. "Some so big they have to go around towns like this."

A black-haired French girl moved up to the jeep.

"How do you do, mademoiselle," says Coster.

She returns the greeting.

"I don't want you to judge us all by what a few of our people have done," she says. "We are glad the Americans have come."

"*Oui! Oui!*" the others chorus.

"Some of our people resisted," she says, "but we are not all like that. We hate the Germans."

"Boche! Bah," says a one-armed Frenchman, spitting upon the ground and rubbing it out with his foot. "Boche!" His lips curl with hate. "See this," he says, tapping the empty sleeve. "Lost that in the last war in France. I fought with the Americans there. We're glad they've come at last. We've been expecting you for a long time."

It's time to move on. Our column heads south out of Sainte Barbe. A captain of police salutes us as we pass the police barracks.

Just outside Sainte Barbe we halt again. Our advance tanks have stopped and dispersed. They are spread out in the fields to the left and right of the road.

Suddenly there's a blast like dynamite and the dirt erupts in the road just ahead. A French 75 battery on a near-by hill has got our range.

We turn the jeep and get the hell out of there. But not before we see a Spitfire wing in over the hill and shoot up the battery with machine-gun fire.

We turn off on a side road and head for the airdrome.

We see an American crossing a field toward us. He is waving. We stop. He trudges up. When he gets close we see that he is a pilot. He is dusty and looks weary.

"Hi, fellers," he says. "What about a ride to Tafaraoui?"

He hops aboard and we start off again.

"My name's Avery," he says. "William B. Avery, from Salt Lake City." He's got the gold leaves of a major on his shoulders.

"I was strafing a French artillery battery," he says, "when they got in a lucky shot. I had to crash land in a field over there." He points toward the north over the rolling hills. "I landed within a few hundred yards of a French column but got the hell out of there before they could reach me.

"This has been a field day for us. There's about thirty of us pilots over at Tafaraoui, and we've been having fun. We haven't slept in forty-eight hours. Been hammering tank columns, ground forces, and artillery batteries continuously. I got a tank and three troop lorries before they shot me down. The Legion armored column is retreating southward now. I got to get to the airdrome and get another plane and take after them. We can't let them escape."

Avery munches on a piece of chocolate as we ride through the falling dusk.

It's dark when we arrive at the airdrome. There's no water.

I sit with a bunch of pilots on the edge of the air field. We open tin rations—the first food I have had in twenty-four hours except tea just before I left the boat.

I watch red flashes knife the sky. There is a continuous roar of big guns from Oran-way, just across the hills.

I pull my jacket about me and try to go to sleep there under the stars.

It's been a tough day and tomorrow there will be plenty of work to do.

Just as I am about to fall asleep, Lieutenant Carl W. Payne, 21, of Columbus, Ohio, yells to me:

"Parris," he says, "how would you like to be going to the Stork Club?"

A voice pipes up. It belongs to Major Harrison R. Thyng, of Barnstead, New Hampshire.

"Nuts to you guys," he says. "Cut out that kind of talk and go to sleep."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

MORE notes from a war correspondent's diary:

November tenth—Doolittle's Twelfth Air Force Headquarters Somewhere in the North African desert.

The whirr of wings awakens me. It's just getting light. My limbs are stiff and it's cold. Sleeping on the ground isn't much fun when you don't even have a blanket.

I walk across the field in the half-light of a cold gray dawn to operations headquarters and sit down to a breakfast of hard-tack and coffee, and listen to the radio reports coming in from our pilots out on a tank-busting raid.

At mid-morning a dilapidated French automobile with a French driver drives up. A young American flying lieutenant hops out.

"Hi, Rebel," somebody greets him. "Been seeing the sights?"

The lieutenant is hatless and his clothes are dirty and torn, but he's grinning.

"The natives are too damn hostile," he replies. He turns to me. "Haven't met you," he says. "I'm Roland Wooten from Saint Stephens, South Carolina."

"A ground battery got my gas tank," he says. "I had to crash land in the desert. A flock of Arabs surrounded my plane. They looked at me as if I had just come from Mars. They stood off at a safe distance chattering in Arabic. I couldn't understand a word they said. They made the first friendly move when the chief came over and offered me his hand. I left them guarding my plane after giving the chief a gold Napoleon dollar. Right now I'd like some coffee."

Noon. Incoming Spitfire pilots report successful operations against armored columns and artillery positions. At least six tanks have been destroyed and a number of lorries shot up.

Some of the pilots have just come in from a leaflet raid on Oran where they dropped Giraud's proclamation, telling the French:

"The Americans are here to help you. Save your bullets for the Boche."

No French planes have been reported in the sky today. Looks like they have all been destroyed or captured or they haven't got enough gas to operate.

Somebody told Coster that the French had only enough gas to operate their planes for twenty-four hours.

Doolittle arrives to assume command. I have a chat with him and find the Tokyo raid hero a hell of a nice guy, frank and straight to the point. He explains just what the Twelfth Air Force is going to do in North Africa. Says he's got a grand bunch of pilots—boys who can fly and fight.

I lunch on sardines and hardtack seated on the wing of a captured French bomber. As I munch my food I watch Spitfires land and take off as they supply aid to our ground forces in the Oran area.

Reconnaissance pilots report that the French Foreign Legion armored striking force is practically broken. A few straggling vehicles are in retreat toward Sidi-bel-Abbès, their headquarters.

Pilots have been given instructions not to molest them since they are moving out of the field of action.

An armistice is imminent.

Algiers has fallen.

Oran is expected to capitulate any moment.

All the American officers admit that the French "fought and fought damn hard."

"They got a lot of guts," said a major.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

NOTES from a war correspondent's diary:

November eleventh—It's 3 P. M. The little village of Saint Leu is hot and smelly and quiet.

The war is over. The soldiers have grounded their guns for the moment. But to the east, over the hills and across the mountains, another war is raging—the battle for Tunisia.

This is another Armistice Day. The date is the same but the circumstances are different. Then the French were victorious, today they are the ones who have surrendered.

Now, for the first time since the fall of France, the villagers here can pay tribute to their World War dead. Vichy France had prohibited celebration of Armistice Day.

French and American soldiers gather in the town square. Only yesterday they were fighting each other. Now they are friends, pledged in a common cause to defeat Hitler and liberate France.

An American flag flies alongside a French flag, over the town hall.

The acting mayor of the village, M. Octave La Llemmand, a chunky little man in morning coat and striped trousers with his mustache waxed and stiff, flanked by an American guard of honor, leads a parade of soldiers and villagers through the streets to the memorial for the World War dead.

Before the memorial in the shade of palm trees, the mayor speaks:

"This is a day of glory, yet a day of mourning. The Americans have come as friends, not as enemies. France must liberate herself with the help of the United States. Once again, just as a quarter of a century ago, the Americans have come to help us. I ask that we do all we can for them while they are in our country."

A French girl places a wreath on the memorial.

Frenchmen and Arabs and American soldiers stand in silence for a minute while a Catholic priest prays.

The parade re-forms and returns to the town square where Major Graham Madison, of New York City, makes a brief speech to the villagers.

"Americans and French twenty-five years ago ended World War I as brothers in arms," he says. "American soldiers are here to re-establish a firm and lasting friendship between Americans and French and to restore the glory that was France."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

NOTES from a war correspondent's diary:

November twelfth—Doolittle's Twelfth Air Force Headquarters Somewhere in North Africa.

For the moment the war is over for Jimmy Doolittle's airmen but they will be moving up soon to take a crack at the Germans and Italians in Tunisia.

7 A. M. I shave for the first time in five days. We still haven't set up a mess; we're still eating out of cans. It's raining this morning and the airfield is a quagmire.

9:30 A. M. A jeep pulls up in front of operations headquarters. Out hops Major Guy R. Richardson, Jackson, Mich. He's muddy and has a three-day beard.

"I went into Oran with one of the first American tanks," Richardson says. "You should have seen our boys. They put up

a great fight. Battered tanks, busted artillery, and dead horses litter the road into Oran. Snipers are still operating. It's dangerous to move about yet in Oran. A sniper just missed me as I stood in front of an Oran hotel last night."

3 P. M. We stand in a palm grove back of the airdrome. The rain has stopped and the sun is out. Six coffins lie side by side in the mud. They are draped with American flags. A guard of honor stands at stiff attention.

It is the burial of our dead.

Major William J. Walsh, air force chaplain from St. Paul, Minn., reads the Scriptures and says a prayer for the boys who have fallen.

Private Albert Peebles, Meadsville, Pa., places a bugle to his lips. The quiet afternoon is broken by the solemn, touching notes of taps. . . .

" . . . day is done . . . gone the sun . . . safely rest . . . all is well . . . God is nigh . . ."

The coffins, one by one, are lowered to their last resting place as rifle bolts snap and volleys crash.

November thirteenth.

10 A. M. I am off to Oran via Arzu in a jeep.

Along the road to Arzu white-sheeted Arabs sit basking in the sun. They salute us as we pass and ask for cigarettes. We pass mile after mile of marching soldiers who appear pack-weary, sweaty and dusty.

Arzu is a city of sounds and smells. A city overrun with Americans. The dock area is bustling, busy. Dozens of transports and cargo ships are still being unloaded.

From Arzu we wind through the rolling green hills splashed with olive trees. In the peaceful fields graze sheep and goats, herded by lonely Arabs.

This is the road our boys took from Arzu on their march to Oran. The roadside is littered with burned-out tanks and lorries. There's been a war here. You see it everywhere. Some of the

French have come back and are trying to salvage what they can from the tanks and lorries. They salute as we pass. It's hard to believe that just twenty-four hours ago they were trying to kill us and we were trying to kill them.

2:40 P. M. We roll into the little village of Saint Cloud, a village of dun-colored houses and palm-lined streets. The folks here appear none too friendly. A lot of people were killed here. Buildings along the main street are shell-pocked. Half the church steeple is gone—one of our shells wiped out a machine-gun nest there. Resistance was stiffest here—there was a pro-German mayor who ordered the villagers to take up arms.

Beyond Saint Cloud we run upon half a dozen burned-out tanks. In a near-by field a dozen dead horses lie with their feet stuck in the air. The smell of decaying flesh is horrible. This is where our boys wiped out a cavalry detachment.

We bare our heads as we pass a French funeral procession. The French are burying their dead. I wonder how they can reconcile the circumstances that caused the deaths of their sons. Yesterday they were against us, today they are with us. I realize that back home mothers are also mourning their sons who died by French bullets.

Oran.

This is a city of white buildings.

The people here are still pretty cool to us. They appear dazed.

An Italian Armistice commissioner's car stands in front of the Grand Hotel. There's an American gold star on it now.

Oran's shops are filled with American soldiers buying perfume to send home. They hope it gets there for Christmas.

## CHAPTER THIRTY

Two men faced each other in a little room of a big white villa overlooking the blacked-out harbor of Algiers in the early hours of November eleventh.

One was French, the other American.

Admiral Jean François Darlan, who had sworn never to hand over his fleet to any man, had two choices. As representative of Vichy he could say the word and let the French forces be wiped out in a last, bloody, forlorn conflict of the African campaign. Or he could surrender.

Major General Mark Clark waited patiently for the decision.

There was a strange stillness and the two men looked so different from each other. Darlan short and a little stoop-shouldered, Clark tall and erect. Darlan in a blue civilian suit and black tie and nothing to mark his rank, Clark in clean and well-pressed battle-dress telling his rank by the two stars on the shoulders.

Finally, Darlan raised his bowed head and straightened his shoulders.

"Our engagements have been fulfilled," he said in a tired voice, "and bloody battles become useless."

He paused, but Mark Clark knew what the next words would be before they were spoken.

"We cannot continue," said Darlan. "We surrender."

The general and the admiral shook hands.

"I will give the orders to cease fire immediately," said Darlan.

He picked up a pen and began constructing the order. When he finished, he handed the paper to Clark.

Clark nodded assent:

Darlan rose and dispatched the order.

Across Algeria and Morocco it flashed, to ports and cities and outposts in the Sahara, to sailors and soldiers and Legionnaires, to airmen, and to civilians.

"Our engagements having been fulfilled and the bloody battle become useless," Darlan told them, "the order is given to all land, sea and air forces in North Africa to cease the fight against the power of the Americans and their Allies as from the receipt of this order, and return to their barracks and bases and observe the strictest neutrality.

"In Algeria and Morocco the commanders in chief will put themselves in liaison with local commanders on the subject of terms for the suspension of hostilities.

"I assume authority over North Africa in the name of the Marshal (Henri Pétain). The present senior officers retain their commands, and political and administrative organizations remain in force. No change will be made without new orders from me. All prisoners on each side will be exchanged."

The order reached Vice-Admiral Michelier in Casablanca last. He surrendered to Major General George S. Patton, commander of the American west wing. Michelier's order ended resistance at the chief port of Morocco and the last point of resistance along a coastline stretching more than 1,300 miles. The fall of Rabat, capital of Morocco, had come several hours earlier.

Casablanca was the last to fall.

The cease-fire order was given in North Africa at 7 A. M.

Strange that this armistice should fall on the anniversary of the armistice of that other war.

In the French outposts and barracks and cities and ports there were roll calls and the stacking of arms.

But the American gunners did not fire a salute of grand triumph. The victory was hollow, if victory it could be called.

The Americans had had to fight a people whom they looked upon as friends. Hitler and Mussolini had made it so.

Ahead was the real enemy, over there to the east beyond the hills across the Tunisian border and across the sea where the soft under-belly of Europe jutted into the Mediterranean.

When the American and British forces had cleared Europe, their gunners could fire a salute of grand triumph, for the enemies of the Four Freedoms would have been brought to their knees.

In Oran and Algiers and Casablanca there were no signs of rejoicing among the American and British troops. What rejoicing there was emanated from the population who now were free of the Nazi yoke.

The rank and file of the armies—French and Anglo-American—traded cigarettes. The fight was forgotten. Together, French and Anglo-American were now wedded in a common cause—the defeat of Hitler.

The sudden end of hostilities freed the powerful American forces to swing their full weight eastward, and swift mobile units struck immediately across the hills toward a prospective collision with air-borne Axis troops rushed to Tunisia.

Advance forces captured Bougie, on the coast one hundred and twenty miles east of Algiers and one hundred miles from the Tunisian frontier.

As the American and British forces rushed across those hills and mountains toward an almost legendary site laid waste by the Romans, General Henri Giraud began massing his French forces to join the Allies.

The men who had been beaten were to fight again—this time with the Americans and British, not against them.

Giraud's complete strength numbered about four thousand officers and ninety-two thousand men, not counting a force of about the same size in Morocco incorporating some forty-two thousand white troops.

From Algeria, Giraud began forming a new French army with six regiments of Zouaves, six regiments of the famous Chasseurs d'Afrique (cavalry), five regiments of the Foreign Legion, three groups of field artillery, one group of heavy artillery, one battalion of engineers, one regiment of the Flying Corps, and undetermined native levies.

They needed guns and supplies. It would take time to outfit them.

During that armistice day, General Eisenhower issued a special statement on the occasion.

"As commander in chief of the Allied forces," he said, "I am happy to participate in the liberation of French North Africa. Therefore it is a great privilege for me to salute with deep respect the memory of Marshal Lyautey on the birthday of that

great soldier of France who created the North African empire.

"It is particularly fitting that I should pay tribute to Lyautey, since the forces under my command bring with them the solemn assurance that his achievement—the North African empire—shall remain French."

The sun went down and night came, peacefully, silently.

The bivouacs glinted like fireflies on the darkening hills.

Across the great expanse of hill and desert and mountain, the guns had fallen silent.

Peace was upon the land—for the moment.

The war was over here. But there were new campaigns ahead.

This was merely the end of the beginning, the springboard to victory.

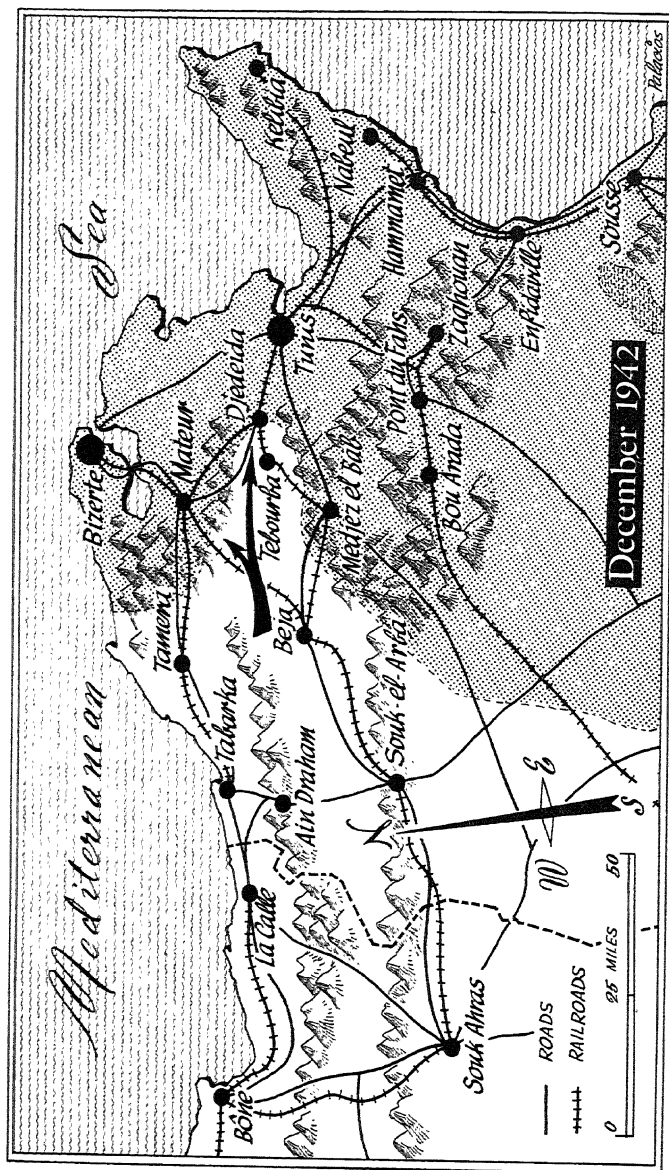


PART VI

*THE LONG CHANCE*

(From mid-November to mid-February)

*By Ned Russell*



## CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

THE British First Army and its few American supporting units and liaison officers were racing toward Tunis and Bizerte. They were gambling on the long chance that they could take over the two key cities of Tunisia in sufficient force to hold them against German air-borne landings. It was a race in which every hour counted, because the Germans were flying troops into the two cities and giving them what odd guns and tanks and trucks were on hand and then assigning them to strategic positions along the roads in the hills to the west.

It was a chance which General Eisenhower could not ignore. The landing at Algiers had been achieved much more easily than anyone had dared to hope and there was a good chance that Tunis and Bizerte could be snatched from the Germans by only a very small force. If General Eisenhower and General Anderson had won their gamble, the North African campaign would have been won months earlier, probably some time in January, or, with the best of luck, by Christmas. As a matter of fact, they came within forty-eight hours of winning in the last days of November and the first days of December.

A quick victory or a long siege-like struggle depended on transport. The limited amount of shipping available to the Allies for the landing prohibited bringing enough trucks in the first two convoys to Algiers to carry enough men and their tons of supplies and equipment across more than six hundred miles of rough, mountainous roads into Tunisia. To offset this handicap as much as possible, the British Navy had performed super-human tasks and had the harbor of Bône, the easternmost harbor of Algeria, functioning as the Allies' main advanced base seventeen days before it was even scheduled to be taken.

General Eisenhower was using every type of transport he could find. And the railroad, even though it was only a single track most of the way to Bône, became vitally important. But the political situation, which demanded that the Allies avoid any forthright seizure of local facilities, enabled the French railroad authorities to run their trains more or less as they pleased. There was an amazing absence of any feeling of urgency in the way the military trains were operated.

The four-hundred-mile journey to Bône furnished a pathetic example of how the Germans and Italians had seized the best of a poor and antiquated assortment of railroad equipment. There had been only a few engines in North Africa which could be called modern, and they had been shipped to Europe to help to ease the Axis transport problems. The more modern passenger carriages and freight trucks also had been seized and taken across the Mediterranean. Only battered and dilapidated stock had been left behind and that had to be pulled by wood-burning engines because most of the normal imports of coal from France had been stopped.

The journey also revealed the reluctance with which certain French authorities were adjusting their comparatively easy life to the hard demands of war. I don't know how much, if anything, the Allies paid for the use of the railroads, but it seemed incredible that military trains should not have priority over everything else on the line. The train stopped for periods of a half-hour to three or more hours every few miles. Several times I noticed that we were sidetracked and a passenger train went by. These stops had only one advantage for the troops—and that only when they happened at meal time. Then the troops poured out of the train and in a few moments a great fire was blazing somewhere near the tracks or in a shed and after another ten or fifteen minutes canned hot food was being dished out to everyone.

Jordan and I boarded the train in the blacked-out station in

Algiers shortly after midnight and settled ourselves in a third-class compartment with three British officers. At 1:30 A. M. the engine, which looked like a replica—or perhaps the original—of early American railroad engines, puffed nervously and started its laborious journey, which was to take forty-four hours. Seven hours later, when we awoke, with stiff backs and necks after sleeping on the two wooden benches in the compartment, we were seventy-five miles from Algiers. The train was resting in the station of a town whose name I can't remember. The engine was gasping from exhaustion after hauling its load of thirty carriages and trucks, and everyone wondered when, if ever, it would get us to Bône.

The countryside of eastern Algeria, with its broad, rolling plains and the great Atlas Mountains, looked like Southern California and Arizona. The resemblance, however, was only in the physical geography and the weather, because there were none of the brilliant colors of the states of the Southwest. But the Arab villages of stucco houses, with their red-tiled roofs, reminded me of California, and the dirty, thatched-roof, mud-brick huts of the more poverty-stricken Arabs brought back memories of Indian settlements in Arizona.

The native Arabs, surrounded by their scrawny, sick, ragged children, showed the terrible poverty that dominated life in the hinterland of Algeria. Most of the children, and many of their elders, were living horrors of disease. Their hands and arms and legs were covered with raw sores, mostly from syphilis. They scampered barefooted along the railroad track, begging for cigarettes, while the older men stood indifferently in little groups. They wore only patched, dirty rags, which they hung on their bodies like robes, and their faces and eyes showed the terrible strain they endured just to keep alive.

Conversation on the train centered mostly on the campaign. Looking back on some of the discussions now, it is hard to understand the total misconception of the scope of the campaign.

We talked of Tunis and Bizerte being as good as captured and some of us even wondered how long it would take us to get to Tripoli.

A British brigadier, with a clearer insight of the situation, told me that the Germans apparently were content to hold only Tunis and Bizerte, with their air fields and harbors, and already had landed between four thousand and five thousand troops at the two points. He said there were a hundred and fifty German planes at Tunis and about fifty at Bizerte. Their problem, like ours, was a shortage of transport. Additionally, there were reports that the French troops in Tunisia, or at least some of them, were making things difficult by blocking roads.

British paratroops had taken Bône on November twelfth. They had been dropped from American transport planes and at the same time a couple of British destroyers had steamed into the harbor and landed a mixed force of British and American commando troops. However, there had been no opposition.

The port of Bougie also had been taken. The German and Italian air forces were working feverishly to disrupt the operations at the ports of both Bône and Bougie.

There was another brigadier on the train who was on his way to Philippeville, another small port, to take it with a letter of introduction to the local French commandant.

The main forces of the First Army were just about crossing the Tunisian frontier, where they would split, one pushing toward Bizerte and the other swinging southward and then eastward toward Tunis—and perhaps then to Tripoli.

The train finally arrived at Bône about mid-evening of November sixteenth. A British officer who met us reported that the French were cooperating "wonderfully" and were overjoyed by the Anglo-American landing, because they knew it meant the beginning of a new era for them. He said that whenever the British military authorities approached the mayor of Bône about requisitioning a building, the mayor always agreed promptly and often suggested that they take over another building, too.

The Germans had put armed guards in the fields when the crops were being harvested to make sure that everything they wanted was handed over. The French knew that the British and Americans would not manhandle them and seize their food and clothing and other necessities.

The next day Jordan and I arranged to travel on a truck convoy to the front. A British brigade, representing about half of the forward forces of the First Army, had crossed the frontier of Tunisia. We were told that the first clash with the Germans was expected at any moment; in fact, the battle might already have started.

We left Bône late that afternoon and arrived at Tabarka, a pleasant little frontier village on the coast, just before dawn the following morning. I can't remember much about that eighty-mile drive except a combination of bitter cold and pouring rain that hit me in the face as I sat in the front of a truck which had no side windows. The night was pitch-black and the convoy had to stop frequently in order to keep together. There were no headlights and each truck groped cautiously in the darkness to avoid crashing into the truck ahead of it. Constant strafing of the roads by cannon-firing Messerschmitts had made daylight travel in the forward zone too hazardous. The German strategy was obvious. They knew the First Army must be suffering from an acute shortage of transport, and every truck they could knock out on the road made that shortage even more severe. Now, with almost everything moving at night, the main dangers lay in collisions and in trucks careening into ditches.

In Tabarka, we walked along a road to what had been a cork factory until a few days before and now was the brigade headquarters. Inside the old barnlike building great bunches of unfinished cork were piled all over the dirt floor. It was fairly dry, but there were only three walls to the building and the wind whistled through it all the time. Outside, beyond where the fourth wall should have been, was a mass of thick, slushy mud. There were more and bigger piles of cork outside and they

seemed to offer reasonable protection from bomb fragments or cannon shells or machine-gun bullets.

There were plenty of bombing and strafing to worry about, too. The road in front of the headquarters stretches along a little, narrow valley and then winds into the mountains, beyond which lay another and much bigger valley which was of immediate importance in mounting the direct attack on Tunis. The Luftwaffe, striving to delay Allied communications, was trying to gouge craters in the road and succeeded three or four times after dropping many bombs. To the east, from the edge of Tabarka, runs the main coastal road. It crosses a bridge, which also was a target for the German bombers and fighter-bombers, and then snakes through the low, rolling hills all the way to Bizerte.

The German planes screamed low through the little, narrow valley and over the two roads, spitting cannon shells and machine-gun bullets at anything and anyone in sight. Everyone was ordered to stay out of sight as much as possible, and every military vehicle and soldier was well camouflaged among little clusters of trees. Fierce rain, heavy hail storms, and icy winds swept through the valley and the hills, drenching everything. The troops huddled together in their green, water-proof gas capes under the trees or laid out their sleeping bags in the soggy mud or in ditches. They were busy digging slit-trenches in which to escape the strafing Messerschmitts, but the trenches soon were only mud puddles. Almost every soldier I talked to had a harrowing story of narrow escapes from Messerschmitts which had swooped out of the clouds or over the hill tops and machine-gunned them from as low as fifteen feet.

At headquarters, the brigade major told me that there was heavy fighting for the little Arab village of Djebel Abiod, about twenty miles inside the frontier and about five miles from the coast. A shock force of British troops, designed along the lines of the Eighth Army's "Jock Columns," which are given long-range reconnaissance tasks and are equipped to fight a full-scale battle wherever they encounter opposition, had clashed with a

German armored column about mid-day of November sixteenth, two days before. The German force consisted of about fifteen Mark IV tanks, two or three companies of motorized infantry, and one troop of field artillery, including some howitzers. The German tanks were painted a creamy yellow—the usual desert camouflage—which meant that they had been destined for Rommel's Afrika Korps and were being diverted to meet the First Army.

About fifteen minutes after the German column had been sighted, British anti-tank guns and twenty-five-pounders opened fire. Four of the tanks stopped and burst into flames. The long-awaited "contact" with the Germans had been made. For the next four hours the two forces had battled fiercely. After the first shots were fired, the German column deployed on the small, flat plain that lies just to the north of Djebel Abiod. The Germans concentrated their fire on the British guns and their infantry crept close enough to splatter the British with machine guns and lob mortar bombs into their midst. The Germans had fought hard to get inside the British positions and establish a foothold there. Toward the end of the first phase of the battle, they had called up Messerschmitts, which strafed and bombed the British without decisive results. The first phase of the battle ended with eight German tanks destroyed and between thirty and forty Germans lying dead or wounded on the plain. The British had lost four anti-tank guns and four twenty-five-pounders. The First Army had won a good, though small, victory.

The battle of Djebel Abiod, which dominates several miles of the road to Bizerte, about fifty miles farther east, was still raging in the mud and rain. The British troops, without either tanks or air support, were holding doggedly to their positions around the town. They had fought for forty-eight hours without sleep. Additionally, the Germans were bringing up new tanks, more artillery, and were sending more Messerschmitts to try to pry the British from their positions.

That night, the brigadier commanding the brigade sent a small convoy of trucks carrying fresh troops and supplies to his beleaguered force. He had been unable to send them anything by daylight because the Messerschmitts were shooting up anything that moved on the road—even lone dispatch riders on their motorcycles. The road into Djebel Abiod could only be used under cover of darkness because the Germans controlled a six-hundred-yard stretch of it near the town. They had dug in their tanks on the north bank of a river running to the north and northwest of the town and had established their guns and howitzers in positions to shell the town mercilessly. The British position was extremely shaky, but the brigadier was confident it could be held as long as he could use the road at night, although it was obvious that there was not going to be any headlong push into Bizerte now.

Knowing that the drive for Bizerte and Tunis could not be launched immediately, and feeling that people in the United States and Britain would get curious and suspicious if the First Army appeared suddenly to bog down almost within reach of its goal, I wrote a story trying to explain the position. I knew a blunt analysis of the situation—saying that the British infantry were hemmed in without anything to match the gun-power and tanks and planes of the Germans—would not pass the censors in Algiers. The Germans had a definite superiority in matériel and an explanation seemed needed. I wrote a story describing how the British lack of air cover and tanks was due to the fact that the Allied plans had gone “completely haywire, but for the first time they had gone wrong in the right way.” The troops were days ahead of their time-table and now had to sit tight in the soggy mud and wait for their reinforcements and heavy equipment and air support to arrive. But all that was cut out in Algiers, as I learned two months later.

That night, Jordan and I decided to return to Bône. We simply were not equipped to live in that driving rain and hail and freezing wind. Jordan, who had covered the Eighth Army in the

Western Desert, the Russian armies in Russia, and the British forces in Burma, said these conditions were worse than anything he had ever experienced.

The trip back was worse, if that was possible, than the trip to Tabarka had been. We huddled together under a canvas ground-sheet on the back of an open truck with the rain and hail beating on our faces. Once, when the hail suddenly clattered down in unusually big chunks, I put my steel helmet over my face. We rode there for five hours and reached Bône about midnight.

The next day, Thursday, November nineteenth, I visited the R.A.F. airdrome on the eastern outskirts of Bône where a little band of tough young daredevils from England, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand was making a herculean effort to overcome greater obstacles than they had ever faced before. I forget the exact number of Spitfires and Hurricanes they had, but it was ridiculously small—not more than twenty-four. Of these no more than a dozen were serviceable at one time, because the maintenance and ground crews had not arrived yet.

Those boys were flying many hours each day, and doing four jobs with barely enough planes to do any one of the jobs properly. They had started operations on the airdrome with only enough gasoline and oil for one day. But after two or three days, the navy had delivered a sizeable stock of fuel and ammunition and the pilots didn't have to worry so much about their supplies.

Their task reminded some of the veterans among them of the days when they were helping to drive the Luftwaffe out of the skies in the Battle of Britain in the autumn of 1941. Here, they were tearing into formations of German and Italian planes three and four times their size, just as they had done over England, and they were whipping them in the same way. They were providing fighter protection for convoys sneaking along the coast to Bône with the supplies which the troops in Tunisia needed so desperately. They were protecting the harbor when the ships were tied up to the docks to unload their valuable cargoes. They were protecting troop trains crawling across Algeria and they

were trying to cover truck convoys whose missions were so important that they had to travel in daylight. And they also had to maintain some sort of patrol over their own base.

In five days, these youngsters had destroyed at least thirty Axis planes. They had lost ten planes of their own, but most of the pilots had been saved to fly again. The planes which had broken down, temporarily, due to mechanical difficulties or minor accidents—the rough field resulted in many bad landings—numbered more than those they had lost in combat.

When they had first arrived, the pilots were alone with their planes. They had no ground crews whatsoever. Besides flying, the pilots had to pour gasoline from small tin cans into the tanks of the planes and they had to make mechanical repairs and adjustments as best they knew how. At one stage, only four planes were serviceable, but they went up to meet a formation of sixteen German bombers, escorted by some Italian fighters, and chased the whole formation out to sea without suffering a scratch themselves.

Chatting with one of the pilots, I told him how desperately the troops at the front needed some air support, no matter how little. He knew the few planes on the field could not give the troops more than a moment's respite from the Luftwaffe's constant pounding, but he wanted to give me some word of hope to take to the men when I went back to the front.

"As soon as we get the planes, we'll give them all the cover and offensive support they want," he said. "In the meantime, we're doing everything possible to help them get the supplies and reinforcements they need. I guess we better send a couple of the boys over there somehow to shoot down a few Jerries. Just to help the troops' spirits a little."

Back in town I met several of my commando friends from Sidi Ferruch. They had been in the sea-borne landing at Bône and now were posted around the airdrome to protect it against a possible attack by German parachutists. I had not met the officer commanding the two battalions of commandos before,

but he turned out to be one of the best friends Bill Stoneman and I had during the campaign. Another new arrival in town was Drew Middleton of the *New York Times*. He reported that Stoneman was buying a car in Algiers and would be along any day with Bill King of the Associated Press. The four of us had planned to buy a car in which we could travel around the front without having to depend on military transport.

The next day Stoneman and King arrived, glowing with pride over Stoneman's success in buying a 1934 Ford V-Eight sedan for \$450, which was split four ways. It was a real triumph to buy any sort of automobile in Algiers, where most of them had been lying idle in garages for two or three years and where the British and American military authorities were offering to buy anything that would move.

The other half of the First Army, one brigade and an outfit known as "Blade Force," made up of a few tanks of the British Sixth Armored Division and some American tanks, was maneuvering into position to strike for Tunis. The Germans had occupied Mateur, mid-way between Tunis and Bizerte, and Medjez-el-Bab, about thirty-five miles west of Tunis, and Goubellat, ten miles south of Medjez-el-Bab. German patrols were reported moving southwest from Mateur toward Beja, an important road junction about fifteen miles west of Medjez-el-Bab. The Germans were getting ready to meet the push.

On Saturday, November twenty-first, we packed the little car with eight army blankets, three typewriters, a five-gallon can of water, a couple of boxes of American field rations, four musette bags, four heavy trench coats and ourselves and set off for the "Tunis Front."

## CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

THE hastily mobilized French army of General Giraud began to appear, gradually and in scattered pockets, in the rear areas

of the front shortly after the middle of November—just before the first push for Tunis began.

The French were proud to be fighting again at the side of the Americans—as in 1917 and 1918—and of the British, from whom they had separated, a little bitterly, in the summer of 1940. At this time they frankly preferred the Americans to the British. Axis propaganda had convinced many of them that the British had “deserted them” when France was attacked. Additionally, the Royal Navy’s attack on the French fleet at Oran, after France had fallen, was misunderstood and deeply resented. But now the United States and Britain were allies and the one had to be accepted with the other. Now, too, the war was being won by the Allies, and General Eisenhower, as supreme commander-in-chief of the North African expedition, was doing everything he could to keep politics in the background.

This fight, which the French knew must end in the restoration of France, was something they could cling to because now they had allies that were strong—stronger than the enemy with whom they had lived, helplessly and passively, for more than two years. Their conquerors, who had treated them as a beaten people and had exploited their homeland, were being made to squirm. Germany and Italy were finally on the defensive.

But this small French army, dressed in bedraggled uniforms which had lain crumpled in old trunks and boxes for two years, presented a pathetic scene. It wished to carry its full share of the Allied burden, especially when fighting on its own territory. However, it had no equipment worthy of the name in a war which had become a contest of forty-mile-an-hour tanks and four-hundred-mile-an-hour airplanes—a war which rolled on power-driven wheels. This French army moved at the pace at which tired, old mules could drag heavy, wooden wagons, or at which men, carrying heavy packs on their backs, could walk.

And while the French plodded slowly along the roads, their highly trained, efficient-looking American and British allies sped swiftly past them in big, powerful trucks or in twenty-eight-ton

tanks or half-tracks or tough little jeeps. The French looked enviously at this array of modern fighting equipment, and I think, in a way, they must have wondered why they couldn't have some of it. Few of them realized then that the American and British equipment rolling toward the front was not enough, even when in the hands of men trained to it, to achieve the quick victory which everyone thought was only a few days away. Tunis and Bizerte were only a comparatively few miles away and what was there to stop the momentum of the Allies' drive?

The French equipment consisted of a few old rifles and machine guns and some 75-mm. guns, mostly remnants of World War I. What modern equipment they had had for fighting World War II had been taken by the German and Italian Armistice Commissions. The French war machine had been stripped virtually to nothing.

The French had to get along as best they could with what they had. It simply was not enough for fighting the Germans, whose three years of almost constant campaigning and ten years of war production had produced probably the best-equipped and craftiest soldiers in the world, outside of Russia.

As a result, the French had to content themselves with guarding the communications of their allies. They couldn't really fight, unless the battle came to them in the form of parachutists floating out of the sky to blow up a bridge or a railroad or to mine a road. A few of them, however, were lucky. They were given anti-aircraft guns with which to guard important towns, which had been turned into big supply bases or which were junction points of vital roads. But usually, in the first days anyway, they didn't really have enough ammunition to do much good against the German bombers.

Stoneman, Middleton, King, and I had our first informal meeting with French officers and soldiers on November twenty-second. We were on our way toward the front, then slowly taking shape just west of Medjez-el-Bab, and had stopped at the roadside, outside Souk-el-Arba, to eat lunch under some trees. Our

shady little picnic site turned out to be a French anti-aircraft battery and the half-dozen French officers in charge invited us to lunch with them in the "officers' mess," which was in a small railroad station. We accepted gratefully, because already we were getting tired of the sweet biscuits and canned meats and cheese in our field rations.

The "mess" was a tiny, poorly lighted room dominated by a big, rough table which had been made out of a door placed lengthwise on some boxes. The chairs were more boxes. As we sat around the table, sipping excellent red wine and discussing the war, French soldiers served a delicious hot meal of chicken, sardines, beef, beans, bread, oranges, and prunes. We furnished American coffee and some cheese, from our rations, and they undoubtedly were as much of a treat to the French as their food was to us. They had not tasted good coffee or cheese in two years.

The French officers were in high spirits, believing confidently that they would be back with their families in a few days, or, at the most, two or three weeks. Their reunion with their families was especially important to them because they had left them in Tunis. The officers and many soldiers had fled westward to join the Americans before the Germans were able to control civilian traffic.

They showed us copies of the orders which they had received from General Barre, then commanding the French forces in Tunisia, telling them to fight the Germans. General Barre had issued the orders to all his troops after he had rejected ultimatums from General Nehring, then commanding the German ground forces in Tunisia, and General Kesselring, chief of the Luftwaffe in Tunisia.

On November eighteenth, Nehring had demanded that General Barre turn over all military powers to the Germans. This, of course, meant that all civilian facilities also would have to be geared to the German military demands. He threatened to "open

hostilities" at 7 A. M. the next day if the demand were not met. General Barre rejected the ultimatum and Nehring carried out his threat. At the appointed hour, German troops fired on the bridge at Medjez-el-Bab, claiming that French troops had fired first.

The next day, November twentieth, Nehring apparently thought that Kesselring might be able to persuade General Barre to change his mind. Kesselring went to General Barre and demanded that he order his troops to fight at the side of the Germans. The Luftwaffe would bomb them if they refused. But even as Kesselring spoke, German bombers were attacking the important road junction town of Beja, killing some civilians and troops. General Barre simply ignored Kesselring's demand. He told his troops to fight as best they could and, if possible, to get west to General Giraud's forces. General Barre himself escaped and joined General Giraud.

The luncheon ended with everyone drinking a last toast—"To Victory"—and there was the customary formality of everyone shaking hands all around. The officers and their soldiers waved at us as we drove down the highway and I think they wished they could go with us to the front.

Later, small units of General Giraud's forces were put gradually into the line. Their responsibilities usually were small and most of the time they were mixed with British or American units to plug gaps between the more important strategic positions. In January, however, they had a line of their own into which General Giraud put several thousand men. This line was in what was known as the "area" of Pont du Fahs, south of Medjez-el-Bab.

When the Germans discovered this all-French line, General von Arnim, who by then had taken over command from Nehring, hit it hard. He had a dual purpose in this blow, which he launched about mid-January. He wanted some hills covering the Ousseltia Valley, which the French were holding, and he

wanted to disrupt General Eisenhower's efforts to build up a proper striking force and get it poised for the final push that would end the war in North Africa.

General Giraud's men fought hard and well, but they were overwhelmed by the weight of Von Arnim's gun-power. A great many French soldiers were lost in two or three days' fighting. Most of them were reported killed because they refused to surrender.

The Germans gained the hills they wanted. They also disrupted, to a certain degree, the Allied preparations. British and American troops and tanks had to be rushed from their main positions to stiffen the French line and check the German advance. They stopped the push, short of more hills further west, but they had to stay in their new positions and that meant a general thinning out of their previous line.

With this defeat of the French, it became evident that they could not be given a sector of their own on any important part of the front. Their equipment was too poor to stand up to the Germans' hitting power. They were definitely a weak link in the Allied line, and if that link were broken the British forces in the north and the Americans in central and southern Tunisia would be split.

As a result, most of General Giraud's troops were withdrawn from the line, leaving only a token force which did efficient work especially in night patrolling. The withdrawal was carried out in order to equip the French with modern guns and tanks, without which they could not hope to fight on anything approaching equal terms.

### CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE drive for Tunis began with a fierce artillery barrage at dawn on November twenty-fifth. The barrage was thrown down on a hill which stands beside the main road into Medjez-el-Bab

from the west and which, consequently, commands the approach to the town. The Germans had posted several of their big mortars, which have a range of three thousand yards, and several 88-mm. guns, behind the hill. Their fire was directed by an artillery observer who lay on top of the hill overlooking the Allied positions. Those guns had to be knocked out and artillery was the only way to do the job. Infantry had tried, but the Germans had numerous heavy machine guns protecting their guns and mortars and had cut the infantry to pieces.

The British and American guns, carefully brought up by night and hidden in the smaller hills and gullies to the west, opened up almost in unison just as daylight began to seep over the horizon in the east. It was 6 A. M., and Stoneman, Middleton, King, and I were walking along the Beja-Medjez-el-Bab road toward the forward elements of the First Army which were waiting for the signal to smash into the German positions.

The shells whistled overhead as we walked. We had driven as far as we thought it safe to take a civilian automobile which could not be camouflaged in this barren little area and which might become a target for the Germans if they spotted it. We each had a cardboard box of breakfast rations, for we planned to eat while watching the battle.

As we got nearer the front, Middleton and King saw a comfortable spot on a rocky slope to the left of the road and took up their observation post there. Stoneman and I went on a little farther and found a small American unit, with their half-tracks dispersed between the road and the single-track railway on the right.

The German-held hill was about two miles in front of us. It looked like just another hill, except it was bigger than any other hill in the area and every once in a while a little cloud of gray smoke and brown dust burst from its slope. The guns thundered behind us and the shells screamed overhead but the end of each shell's flight was anti-climactic—just a silent little puff of smoke. However, occasionally, when the breeze blew in our direction,

we heard a faint "boof" several seconds after the cloud of smoke began to disintegrate.

The Allied attack, at that moment, was monotonous. The guns were banging away constantly and that was all there was to it. The Luftwaffe put on the star performance of the day. The only way the Germans could strike back at our guns with any effect was with their Stukas and Junkers 88's and Messerschmitts. They went to work with a fury and an efficiency that was beautiful to watch but terrifying to endure. There were only a very few light anti-aircraft guns and machine guns to try to ward off the blows with which the Luftwaffe hoped, at least, to delay the push.

During the five hours we spent there, watching the shells burst on the hill and mingling with the American troops, I had my first experience of sustained, close air attack. They were five hours of terror mixed with moments of the idle sort of chatter you can hear on any street corner in America. The American troops, who came from several sections of the United States, learned how to hate, too. I heard them curse the Germans with all the anger in their hearts. And, as we were walking back to the car to drive to headquarters to file our stories, I heard them cheer, as if they were at a baseball game, when a formation of Spitfires tore into some Messerschmitts. They cheered again when an anti-aircraft shell started smoke trailing out of a Stuka and the crew baled out, swaying gently to earth on the ends of their parachutes.

When Stoneman and I had selected our vantage point for the morning, we sat down on the edge of an ancient well, which was pumped by a windmill made in Chicago, and ate our cold, dry breakfast.

After breakfast, we met the young commanding officer of the American unit, First Lieutenant William C. Burghardt, twenty-six years old, from New York City. He was telling us about his pre-war career as a skiing instructor when the first formation of twelve Stukas roared overhead, then circled and dived, in that graceful, almost vertical swoop which they do so smoothly, on

some guns just beyond the nearest ridge. Burghardt sipped his tea calmly.

"If I hadn't had pneumonia, I'd be coaching troops in skiing on Mount Rainier today instead of ducking from these bastards," he said. "I was supposed to go to Mount Rainier, after taking an officers' course, but I got pneumonia in the middle of the course and by the time I finished they needed officers for this outfit. And here I am."

Burghardt then turned to the job of perfecting the dispersal of his equipment, because it was obvious that the German planes were going to turn on his unit at any moment. Stoneman and I strolled over to the shade of a tree to sit down and smoke a cigarette.

We had just settled ourselves comfortably and were marveling at this "swell grandstand seat for the artillery" when three Messerschmitts roared suddenly over a little hill to our left. Their cannons and machine guns were blazing, spitting little flashes of red flame, as they came at us only about thirty feet above the ground. We jumped up and ran, faster, I'm sure, than either of us has run in years, to a little culvert under the railroad track. I plunged into the culvert a split second ahead of Stoneman and looked back to see a small black bomb spinning downward. It burst with a great red flash about fifty feet from the tree where we had been sitting and its fragments whistled past the front of the culvert.

Inside the culvert three or four Americans were enjoying the protection of the steel and concrete that surrounded them on two sides and figuring that it was unlikely that a Messerschmitt would strafe the open ends of the tunnel. I don't remember the names of most of the boys, but there was one, Nick Stroma, from Brooklyn, whose interest in, and longing for, news from home seemed typical of most American soldiers that I had met in North Africa.

When he saw the shoulder badge on my uniform, identifying me as a war correspondent, he said:

"Say, how'd Columbia make out?" It took me a moment to realize he was talking about football at this moment when everyone was wondering whether we would live until lunchtime. I told him I didn't know anything about the football games at home, and, in fact, I knew as little about the outside world as the next fellow. But that didn't dim his interest in sports.

"Boy," he said, "all I want after I get out of this is to sit at Ebbets Field in a fifty-five-cent seat in my shirt sleeves, with a couple of hotdogs, with mustard, and shout at those Dodgers. Boy, oh, boy."

Just then someone came and announced that three American soldiers had been wounded in that attack. Stoneman and I went across the rough, dirt field to another little culvert, under the road, where we found three boys with minor wounds in their backs from fragments of cannon shells. They were more shocked than hurt, so we poured sulfanilamide powder, which we had in our first-aid kits, into their wounds, wrapped them in their blankets, and made them lie inside the culvert until help arrived. Within two or three minutes a half-track stopped to take them to a dressing station a few miles back. We were all a little mystified as to how anyone found out about the casualties, but it was a good example of quick work by the American medical units.

As nearly as I can remember, we watched four heavy Stuka attacks that morning. Each time, about twelve of them came over, sometimes escorted by two or three Messerschmitts, and when they were over their target, they peeled off, one by one, and screamed down to within less than a thousand feet. Just as they pulled out of their dive, their bombs slid out of their "bellies" and a second or two later crashed with an ear-splitting crack against the earth, which shook and rumbled as we sprawled flat to escape the flying fragments.

As we were leaving, a fifth formation of Stukas appeared and were circling defiantly in the blue sky, locating their objective and lining up for their dives. The anti-aircraft guns were firing

away, the Bofors guns with their rapid boop-boop-boop and the machine guns with their sharp clatter, were trying, as they had tried every time before, to break up the formation and at least discourage the planes from coming down. This time they had their first stroke of luck. One of the Stukas suddenly broke away from the formation and turned northward, presumably to its base near Bizerte. Then smoke began to pour from its tail and, a moment later, three little figures, looking like toy dolls, tumbled out and fell toward the ground. Their parachutes billowed and they settled slowly and gently to earth, hidden, when they landed several miles away, by the rolling hills.

Our car suffered the first of a series of breakdowns early that evening and the time required to get it started again prevented us from seeing the Anglo-American occupation of Medjez-el-Bab the next day. Such mechanical mishaps are typical of the sort of handicaps besetting war correspondents trying to cover an army still not big enough to provide well-kept transport for them.

However, the Germans had left behind a battalion of parachute troops, who had been among the first units flown to Tunisia and put into the line. They blew up an important bridge in the town and fought a rough-and-tumble rearguard action before falling back toward Tebourba, about twenty miles to the northeast and only twenty miles from Tunis.

We tried to catch up with the battle near Tebourba the following day, but only got near enough to see German airplanes still pounding the First Army spearhead. As we approached the battle area, we met some British correspondents who reported that "it's a little sticky at the front." They had been warned not to go nearer and they urged us to follow their advice. In support of their warning, they produced the commander of a mobile artillery battery who was pulling back his guns because he had run out of ammunition. He explained that he dared not leave his guns in position, to wait for fresh ammunition to be brought up, because the front was "very fluid" and, besides, there were

several German tanks roaming menacingly in the hills on either side of the road. Additionally, the Germans had posted sniper parties in the hills to fire machine guns and mortar bombs at traffic on the road and thus hamper the movement of supplies.

Nehring was not yet ready to make his stand. Every German move still was designed only to delay and harass the Allied advance. The big German effort still was being made by the Luftwaffe, and in a very one-sided affair. Allied fighters were rarely seen over the front and when they did appear it seemed always to be at a moment when there were no German planes in the air.

The next day Seventy-Eighth Divisional Headquarters reported finally that the last Germans had been driven out of Tebourba on November twenty-seventh. The town had been entered the previous night, but the Germans had left another rearguard to delay the next Allied jump toward Tunis. In addition, after the rearguard withdrew, about fifty Germans, some of them dressed as Arabs, had stayed behind and sniped at the American and British soldiers in the town. They had to be rounded up and shot—and that had taken time. This was getting to be a familiar trick of the Germans, to dress parachutists as Arabs, equip them with light, snipers' weapons or explosive charges for sabotage, and drop them behind our positions.

The advance units of the First Army now were on the last lap of their race to Tunis. They were forming up to attack across the low, rolling hills protecting Djedeida, about twelve miles from Tunis, from where they could see, in the distant haze, the outskirts of Tunis. We set out for Tebourba and Djedeida ready to live out the "rest of the campaign" under whatever conditions we found. We figured it would be only a day or maybe two or three before Tunis would be in the hands of the Allies and the final annihilation of all the Axis forces in Africa would be a simple, methodical procedure of killing them or accepting their surrender.

We arrived in Tebourba early in the afternoon of Sunday, November twenty-ninth. American and British guns were boom-

ing all around the town, their orange-colored flashes bursting amid little groves of gray-green olive trees. They were shelling the air field at Djedeida, about eight miles to the east beyond the hills around Tebourba. We walked through Tebourba, looking for some sort of headquarters which could tell us the position of the battle. We had learned that it was extremely hazardous to move in the fighting areas without last-minute knowledge of troop dispositions, both Allied and German.

Tebourba was a shattered, deserted ruin. It reminded me of Hollywood movie scenes of French towns which had been battered to pieces in the World War I. The only signs of life were a half-dozen Arabs, ostensibly indifferent to the spectacle of destruction around them, one pig, one very forlorn-looking donkey, a few chickens and rabbits and three Italians. The Italians, who told us they had come from Nice a month before to work on a new dam in the area and to escape conscription of labor to work in Germany, turned out to be pleasant men who were very generous with a good stock of beer and brandy which did not belong to them. They were guarding the local tavern for the French proprietor, who had fled to the hills with his family and most of the rest of the people of Tebourba. However, they were sure the proprietor would want us to have a few drinks from his cellar.

We had one drink with them and then started out to find headquarters again. This time, however, we met a British dispatch rider who reported that the Allied attack on Djedeida had been thrown back twice already that day. The British had suffered very heavy casualties from cleverly concealed German machine guns and mortars and several American tanks had been knocked out by the deadly 88's. We decided to go forward, but at that moment the Luftwaffe appeared again. There had been constant bombing and strafing that morning and this apparently was the beginning of the afternoon series of attacks. It was foolish for us to try to drive forward, in our conspicuous little car, so we finally elected to stay behind and watch the bombing and

strafing. We also learned about this time that a whole new attack probably would have to be mounted against Djedeida because the German defenses there had proved stronger than anything encountered before.

Our little tavern, with its pretty network of vines covering the garden behind, was in the dead-center of a coordinated layout of anti-aircraft guns. We spent all afternoon there, sipping beer or brandy, watching the German planes attack so many times that we lost count of them, and watching the ack-ack gunners try in vain to break up the attacks. But there were not enough guns to have any noticeable effect. Fighters were needed. But we didn't see any, except Messerschmitts or an occasional Focke-Wulf, all that day. A couple of British army photographers dropped in, had a bottle of beer each, and told us that the local inhabitants had fled, when the Germans withdrew, so quickly that the first British soldiers to enter the town found some half-cooked eggs and a steak, still sizzling, in the kitchen of the police station.

With night coming on we decided to go to a farm on the outskirts of Tebourba, and there we met the weary, tattered remnants of the British Northampton Battalion which had been fighting desperately for two days to get into Djedeida. They had been mown down by German machine guns and plastered with mortar bombs and 88-mm. shells. A young lieutenant, one of the few surviving officers of the battalion, told us how he had led his company into an attack on a ridge southwest of Djedeida at dusk the day before.

"We marched over the ridge and into another little valley," he said. "It looked as if the Germans had left their positions covering the valley. We walked on and started up the next slope. There wasn't a sound from anywhere except our own boots kicking the clods of earth. Then, when we were about forty or fifty feet from the top of the slope, a whole mess of machine guns suddenly opened up on us. They were hidden in a cluster of cactus on the top of the slope. Those Germans camouflage beau-

tifully. You couldn't see anything until their guns started flashing. Even their gray-green uniforms blended with the cactus. It seemed as if they were firing thousands of bullets all at once. We had to fall back. Men were falling all over the place. It was horrible. We had planned to clear out a German 88 so that your American tanks could get into Djedeida. But we never could get beyond those machine guns and the 88 behind them knocked out four of your tanks which were following us. The others had to withdraw."

The Northhamptons renewed their attack again Sunday morning and again ran into withering machine-gun fire. This time, however, the lieutenant's men got to the anti-tank gun position.

"It was a wonderful attack," he said. "We killed at least forty Germans." He pulled his American lease-lend revolver from its holster and patted it with his hand. "Tell whoever made that that it's a bloody good gun. I got five with it myself. I know we killed forty Germans because we went back again last night. We thought there would be some more Germans there. But there were only the bodies. We buried thirty of them ourselves and left the other ten because we had to get back to our base. I don't think those Germans we fought were experienced in close-quarter fighting. When we got in among them they fell to their knees, threw up their hands and shouted for mercy."

Other soldiers reported how General Grant tanks, with their American crews cooperating with the British infantry, had tried to force their way through the German positions and had been stopped by the steady, accurate firing of the German anti-tank gunners. Eighty-eight millimeter shells had crashed through their turrets. One, at least, beheaded an American officer. Most of the crews were badly wounded and the tanks were wrecked. Some of the crews, however, managed to escape from their smashed tanks and run for their lives, hiding in gullies or groves of trees or thick brush.

The First Army had out-run what scanty air cover was available and this, probably more than any other factor, was responsi-

ble for its abrupt halt in the push for Tunis. The lack of air support meant two things. First, and probably most important at this stage of the push, it meant that fighters and fighter-bombers could not be thrown quickly into the battle to knock out the defensive strong points of Nehring's forces and blast open a path for the British infantry. Second, it meant that the Luftwaffe could bomb and strafe the British troops almost at will and slow down their advance. Troops who have been bombed and strafed from the air will usually admit that the attacks do little damage in terms of broken vehicles or casualties but there is no denying the fact that they are terrifying and no one can move, with confidence, during these low-level air assaults. The morale effect is far greater than the actual damage done but it is extremely important, particularly at a moment when only a few hours can make the difference between victory and defeat.

The hills of Djedeida had become the ground for the Germans' big stand. Nehring knew his next stop would be Tunis and he had to stand at Djedeida or attempt a last, desperate defense in the streets of Tunis. His tactics certainly were sound. The Allied spearhead was very thin and he mauled it brutally when it tried to smash through Djedeida. If the town had been captured, its airdrome would have furnished the much-needed advance base from which American and British fighters could operate over the fighting front. The time had come for the German counter-attack which was to save Tunis and secure Rommel's communications in the south for a long time.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

THE German counter-attack was launched in the late afternoon of November thirtieth. We first heard of it when we were walking along a dirt road on the eastern outskirts of Tebourba, looking for the American tank crews who had fought in the bat-

tle of Djedeida, and stopped an American jeep to ask whether we were going in the right direction.

"Yes, this is the way," an excited, young American officer said. "But you better get out of here—quick. German tanks have got us surrounded." He jerked the jeep's gears and sped off down the road.

We debated what to do about this predicament and decided that, since we were afoot, we had better get back to the farm where we had left our car and other belongings. As we started back we met a British anti-tank unit packing its equipment and getting ready to fall back to a better position. We had wondered whether the American officer hadn't been over-alarmed in his broad statement that we were "surrounded," but this withdrawal of anti-tank guns seemed to give his report some substantiation. Anyway, it was enough for us. We walked on a little further and heard machine-gun fire which sounded very near. We jumped into a ditch and held a quick council of war.

"Let's get across those fields and into those hills behind the town," someone said. I think it was Middleton. "We'd better get around the town because the Germans might drive their tanks smack into town and we don't want to find ourselves in the middle of a lot of street fighting."

So we ran across the fields and up the slope behind the town, then through a graveyard and in and out of gullies. When we stopped for breath atop a fairly high slope a soldier, hidden in a trench near by, shouted at us, "Don't stand on the top of the hill like that. You'll be seen." We didn't know who was going to see us and crouched indifferently, trying to appease the soldier without making ourselves too uncomfortable. Then he pointed into the valley below us just as a battery of twenty-five-pounders opened fire. In the distance, coming out of a small woods, were some German tanks, starting across the valley. They were barely discernible against the dark background of trees and brush in the little plain. We resumed our walk toward the farm, a little faster now because we knew the situation was getting bad.

I was tired and winded and Drew walked with me while Stoneman and King went ahead to prepare our "getaway." It was evident that if the Germans threw in enough tanks the Allies would have to fall back and everyone was convinced that Nehring intended to do just that. We concluded that it was best for us to carry out our retreat at night to avoid being caught in a disorganized rout. The guns quieted down as Drew and I finally approached the farm. For some reason, which neither of us has ever been able to understand, we started exchanging reminiscences about our experiences in sports, his as a football star and mine as a tennis player.

It was getting dusk when the little white buildings of the farm were in sight. Suddenly, a red tracer shell zinged across our path about thirty yards in front of us and twenty feet off the ground. Another shell and then several more followed in quick succession. We threw ourselves flat on the ground and looked to the top of the slope from which the shells were coming. There, silhouetted against the dark-blue sky, were four tanks. A couple of them, moving clumsily the way tanks move, turned around and took up "hull-down" positions on the slope behind them. It looked as if they were about to shell our farm and then smash through it.

I crawled forward a few yards to the cover of some cactus on the edge of the farmyard and Drew crawled back to a small ridge behind us to get around and into the farm from the rear. I lay there behind the cactus watching the tanks maneuver on the horizon, wondering what they were going to do and what I should do. Soon, a small group of soldiers, just shadows in the darkness, moved cautiously up the slope toward the tanks. In a moment they were hidden by the darkness and I walked around to an opening in the cactus screen. Inside the farm everyone was wondering whether the little patrol could knock out the tanks or chase them away. It seemed an impossible task. If they could not, how could the farm be defended? There was only one two-pounder anti-tank gun in the camp.

The tanks stopped shooting finally and after about an hour the patrol returned. "They're British tanks, sir," the patrol commander reported to his superior. "They apologized most profusely, sir, but they explained that they had been told that everything on the left side of the road was enemy and they thought they saw some movement behind our farm. They said they were very sorry, sir. I told them I thought it was a bloody poor show."

With this excitement over, Stoneman, Middleton, King, and I planned to leave about midnight when the moon would be bright enough to light the road. But when the time came to get the car running, it wouldn't budge. We began to make jokes about the car's temperament "in the face of the enemy." But jokes didn't help matters and it was impossible to work on the car in the darkness because the most rigid black-out was in force in the camp. Even smoking was forbidden in the open. There was no alternative but to stay overnight and try to get away as soon as the car could be fixed in the morning.

The heavy, dull roar of artillery fire awakened us at dawn the next morning. Outside the little farm worker's hut where we were sleeping, the shells were whistling overhead, and we soon realized that we were in the middle of the battle of Tebourba. Both British and German guns were firing over us. A couple of miles to the south, in the area of the village of El Bathan, the British shells were bursting around and among a grove of olive trees. With field glasses we saw what looked like German tanks churning the dust, but most of the time we could only see the little puffs of smoke and dust blossoming in the valley. After a while, the valley was covered under smoke and dust, fed by more shells being pumped constantly into the area.

The Germans had started a big, two-pronged flanking attack from north and south, swinging their forces in two arcs to meet somewhere west of our farm and hoping to surround all the American and British forces in the Tebourba area. The attack was being made with forty or fifty tanks supported by infantry and artillery. The British and American guns were trying to stop

the German tanks, which were pushing against the British infantry, and the German guns were laying down their fire on the Allied infantry and guns. And most of the shells were flying over our farm. Middleton decided that the crisis of the campaign had come and he started to hitch-hike his way to brigade headquarters where he thought he could get a clearer picture of the battle. Stoneman and King and I decided to stay behind and watch the battle. It seemed a wonderful opportunity to see an actual battle. Besides, there was the car which had to be fixed. . . .

For the second time in less than a week we had a close-up view of the Luftwaffe at work. All that morning, while the shells were splitting the air over our heads, we watched the Stukas and Junkers 88's and Messerschmitts pound the Allied guns and small tank units which were trying to form up to meet the German armor. Previously, the German planes had been fighting a defensive, delaying action. Now they were trying to pin down the Allied forces and blast an opening for their ground troops.

The bombers started their attacks shortly after dawn and continued them at intervals of fifteen or twenty minutes without interruption for seven hours—until early in the afternoon. The target for the first attack was a battery of guns behind a ridge about a thousand yards from us. We watched the Stukas dive and then we saw the familiar clouds of smoke billow over the horizon. Then the heavy boom-boom-boom of the bomb bursts followed.

A few minutes later another formation of Stukas pounced on a bunch of American light tanks and half-tracks dispersed in the field across the road from our farm, preparing to go out and meet the German tanks. I don't know how many attacks were made on that concentration of tanks and vehicles, but each time they attacked, Stoneman and I huddled together in a slit-trench under some trees and tried to count the planes and the bombs as they were disgorged from the bomb-racks and exploded in the

soft field. They were dropping vicious, black anti-personnel bombs which made only small craters in the earth but splattered their fragments hundreds of yards. However, the aiming of the bombardiers seemed poor, if they were trying to get direct hits on the twenty-five or more targets. After each attack, all the tanks and vehicles moved a few yards, altering the design of their dispersal, almost as if to prove they were unhurt. It was evident that the bomb splinters had no effect on the men inside the thickly armored tanks and half-tracks. I heard later that only two men were wounded in this attack and they were caught while standing beside a tank repairing its engine.

All the soldiers in the farm were ordered to keep out of sight when the planes were near by. No one was allowed even to move when they were overhead. Everyone hid in the few bushes or under trees or trucks or just lay motionless on the ground during the attacks. It was doubtful whether the Germans knew the farm had been converted into a sort of rest camp for troops just out of the fighting line. Besides, a field dressing station had been established in the main farmhouse to give emergency treatment to casualties and there were several critically wounded soldiers in it. No one was quite convinced that the Luftwaffe would respect a red cross, if it were laid out on the ground, and it was finally agreed to represent the farm as abandoned. The commanding colonel wanted to spare the troops any unnecessary punishment, particularly when they had virtually no weapons with which to meet air attacks.

However, late in the morning, a Bofors gun was set up on the edge of the farm. Its rapid-fire mechanism was out of order and it could only fire single rounds. It fired methodically at the low-flying German planes and managed to shoot down one Messerschmitt with a direct hit which blasted the tail off the fuselage. The plane twisted crazily in the air, burst into flames and crashed beyond the next ridge. This gun threatened to bring the attacks directly onto the farm if the German pilots reported

that it might be defending something important, perhaps a headquarters. At any rate, it certainly seemed, to us in the farm, to draw unnecessary attention to our defenseless camp.

During one attack, about mid-day, Stoneman and I ducked into our little slit-trench as one of a formation of twenty-odd Stukas dived onto the Americans near us, with its siren howling. It was either way off the line for its target or it was trying to knock out the Bofors. We cringed together as we saw nine or ten bombs tumble out of the Stuka, and we thought they must splatter around us. They burst a few yards in front of the gun and about thirty or forty yards from us. The fragments from them swished over our heads, clipping the leaves off the trees whose shadow we hoped was camouflaging us from aerial observation.

About 2:30 P. M. the first encouraging development of the day's battle happened. British and American fighters appeared over the front in answer to a series of frantic summonses for air support to stave off the bombers long enough to give the Allied armored units a chance to get into position to meet the oncoming enemy tanks. Twelve Spitfires and twelve Lightnings suddenly roared out of the west, flying in two perfect formations. At that moment, four Messerschmitts swooped across the hills and strafed the American tanks trying to move across the road in front of our farm. Then the Messerschmitts climbed to get above the Spitfires and Lightnings for their dash home. As they flew over the two squadrons, one of the Lightnings flipped its nose upward and let loose with its guns. Everybody thought one of the Messerschmitts was hit, because smoke poured from its tail. It began to lose altitude and presumably it crashed somewhere beyond our sight. At any rate, the Lightning pilot's bold stroke provoked cheers from the troops on the ground, who hoped that maybe this was just a forerunner of the air support they needed so desperately.

The noise of the battle on the ground subsided gradually after that. A few mortar bombs burst dangerously near the farm, the blast of one cracking the walls of our little hut where I was writ-

ing a dispatch. At the same time, brief, vague reports came in about the progress of the battle. But they were reports of German progress, mostly, and of Allied maneuvers to check the counter-attack and try to turn it back. But the Germans were attacking with considerably superior strength and it was becoming clear that the Allies would have to fall back to some place where they could dictate the pace of battle and gather enough strength to restore the situation.

About 5 P. M., as the sun was going down, an officer came into our hut and invited me to "come outside and I'll show you something on that little ridge." He waved his arm to the north. We went outside and he gave me his field glasses. "Look along that line of trees on the top of the ridge," he said. "There are twenty-four German tanks among those trees and at least one 88. It looks as if we're goners. If they don't come down and take us tonight, they'll come in the morning and there's not a bloody thing we can do to stop them. You know, there's only one anti-tank gun here and I'm afraid we can't do much with that."

"Well, let's see what happens," I said. "Maybe reinforcements will come in tonight. Maybe it isn't as bad as it looks. God knows it looks bad enough. Let's find Major Rosen—maybe he knows something and, if he doesn't, at least he's got something."

Major David Rosen, from Oakland, California, a liaison officer with the Northhamptons, had been a very cheerful member of the camp all day. He had a good stock of American cigarettes and a bottle of whiskey, and he was very liberal with both. He was a good man to have around in such a moment. Besides, it was apparent that Stoneman and King and I were fast ceasing to be independent war correspondents, who could roam where we pleased, but were now attached to the Northhamptons, at least for the duration of this crisis. We didn't know what advice he could give us, but there was some comfort in the fact that we were four Americans together, in the same predicament.

Major Rosen, a hardy, adventurous man who had found the

day more interesting than exciting, came in and sat down on a box in our room. Everyone agreed that our position looked hopeless, barring some unforeseen development. We started speculating, rather negatively, about what might happen to save us, usually deciding that it couldn't happen, when a British officer came in and announced that the whole camp had been ordered not to move about at all, even during the night.

"There mustn't be a sound here tonight," he said. "Absolutely no smoking outside. The enemy probably will send down a patrol to investigate the farm. If he does, he mustn't see or hear anything. All the sentries have been ordered not to fire under any circumstances unless the enemy puts in an attack."

It was dark outside now and there was only an occasional boom of a gun or the clatter of machine-gun or bren-gun fire in the distance. It is difficult to remember any details of the conversation in the hut. There were awkward jokes about German prisoner-of-war camps and everyone wanted to know about the status of captured war correspondents. We displayed our papers entitling us to treatment as British officers with the rank of captain and it was agreed that we probably would be spending a long time together.

During this discussion, someone came in and told Major Rosen that the commanding officer wanted to see him. In a few minutes, Major Rosen returned and announced that the colonel wanted one of us to meet him in his hut at 7 P. M. for a conference with his officers.

"He's been ordered to try to get out tonight," Major Rosen explained. "He wants one of you to hear his orders so that you'll know how we're going to get out of this mess. We're going right through the German positions."

Quickly, we packed our blankets and other paraphernalia into the car, which Stoneman had repaired between air raids during the day. Each of us had written a long story about the day's fighting, devoting most of them to our own personal experiences and feelings, and now we were filled with new hope that

maybe they had not been written just to keep our minds off our plight.

At seven o'clock, I went into the colonel's hut. It was lit by three candles, stuck onto a box which served as a bedside table next to his cot. The colonel sat on the cot with a plate of hot stew on his lap. He smoked cigarettes chain-style and ate at the same time. Gradually, his officers gathered in the room.

"We've been ordered to go back to brigade," the colonel began. He was calm and confident. "We'll form up in convoy at nine o'clock and take the dirt track that runs parallel to the railroad. We've got about four miles to go and we ought to make it by midnight—before the moon comes up. Try to keep the vehicles about twenty-five yards apart, unless you find you can't see each other. Then you can get closer, but we must avoid accidents. There must be as little noise as possible, especially when we form up, because the enemy might hear us. There's been a good deal of fighting today around brigade—some enemy tanks got through there but were shot up pretty well—and the brigadier wants us to strengthen his headquarters defenses."

Then he laid down the order in which his various units were to form up in the convoy. Gradually, the gloom which had been evident began to vanish and confidence took its place.

A pilot, who had landed his flimsy looking artillery-observation plane at the edge of the farm and had been unable to get away because of the intense German air activity during the day, presented a problem in the escape plan. The colonel invited him to go in his staff car leading the convoy.

"Oh, no, sir, if you don't mind," the pilot said. "I can't leave my aircraft here. I'll get a volunteer to help me start it and wait until there's some moonlight and take off."

The colonel was bewildered at this daring suggestion. "But that field is all plowed up," he said. "Surely you can't take off on that at night. Of course, I don't know anything about these aircraft, but it seems a little reckless, isn't it?"

The pilot was determined not to abandon his plane. To leave

it behind, he felt, would be like deserting his unit. "If I can't get off in the moonlight," he said, "I'll wait until dawn and get off then. But, please, sir, if you don't mind, I'd rather risk it and not leave my aircraft here. I'm sure there's nothing for you to worry about. I'll be all right."

Just before nine o'clock, Stoneman, King, Major Rosen, and I piled into our car. We had invited Major Rosen to take the place left by Middleton so that his car could take an extra soldier. I drove through the farm to the dirt track at the edge of it to get into our allotted position in the convoy. We waited there for some time, not daring to cut off the engine for fear it would not start again. It was running, we learned later, on only four of its eight cylinders. The other trucks and vehicles crept through the darkness into position, their engines sounding like soft whispers, and the soldiers climbed silently into them.

The colonel's staff car and his signals truck behind it moved cautiously forward just after nine o'clock. Our escape had started. The engine of our Ford, gasping as if to keep alive for the next few hours at least, seemed almost to roar. However, it probably wasn't making any more noise than the other trucks and bren-gun carriers and automobiles. The next four hours were one of the most nerve-racking periods I have ever known.

The first half of the night, before the moon rose, was so black that I could scarcely see the silhouette of the signals truck even when it was silhouetted against the horizon in front of me and there were no confusing shadows. But when we passed through a series of olive groves, with the trees and their shadows obscuring the dim starlight, I couldn't see anything until I was within a few feet of bumping into it. Even the dirt track was so faintly visible that I had to rely on the "feel" of the wheels to tell when I was getting off it and into the soft, plowed ground on either side of it.

It was imperative that everyone drive as quietly as possible, with the least practical grinding of gears, because we were well within range of the guns on the German tanks on the ridge to

our right. And, to make conditions more difficult and hazardous, even the special black-out lights on the military vehicles were extinguished. Nor could we smoke, because the tiny glow of a cigarette might catch the eye of a German sentry or patrol. We had no way of telling how, or even if, the Germans were exploring the area in the darkness. We could only reflect on how very vulnerable we were to any sudden attack to ambush our small, virtually defenseless force.

After picking our way through the darkness for two hours, always in low gear, we discovered we had made only about two miles. We could have done the whole four-mile trip faster by walking, but the vehicles and few small-arms and other equipment in the convoy had to be saved. About this time, just as my eyes were aching from the strain of trying to see through the darkness, the Ford coughed and quit. Frantically, I tried to get it going again. It was too dark—and there seemed to be so little time—for Stoneman to putter with the engine, which was becoming one of his most important extra-curricular assignments. We conferred briefly and decided to push the car off the track in order to let the convoy pass. If we couldn't get it started in a few minutes we would take what things we could carry and walk the rest of the way. Just as we started pushing it off the track, it gasped again and started.

At this point, I turned over the wheel to Stoneman. I was too exhausted nervously to continue peering through the dusty windshield and into the pitch darkness. Besides, Stoneman's intimate understanding of the Ford's temperamental engine made it advisable for him to nurse it through the last half of the journey. To help him, I stood on the running board, where it was easier to see, and guided him through the darkness.

"Go ahead," I said. "Now slightly to the left . . . Straighten out . . . Slow down . . . Stop . . . Go ahead . . . Slide over to the right, you're getting off the track . . ."

That's the way we moved, still groping forward in low gear, the last two hours. Then we came to the area of our destination,

where we found a half-dozen German tanks still burning in the darkness. They were some of the tanks which had broken through to the brigade headquarters area and had been knocked out by British twenty-five-pounders. I heard later that an American Lightning fighter had helped in the battle with a spurt of cannon-fire which had blown up one tank. The other Lightnings in the squadron, for some reason I never learned, did not join in the battle. The gunners on the ground were disappointed because they felt that the Lightnings might easily have destroyed the other tanks as they fled out of range of the guns.

A few moments of skillful maneuvering in the darkness finally found the convoy dispersed in an olive grove. The colonel pointed in the darkness and explained to me that brigade headquarters was "on a hill over there." I couldn't see anything. The important thing was that we had reached our goal—and we had escaped. Everyone was exhausted and ready to grab the few hours' rest before daylight would bring a resumption of the battle. Stoneman and Major Rosen laid out their blankets on the ground, under a tree, and King and I twisted ourselves into the most comfortable positions we could find in the front and back seats of the car.

I was awakened at dawn by the glare of the sun rising over the hill to the east and, at the same time, by the noise of a plane. At first I thought it was the usual morning Messerschmitt, prowling around the countryside to find new targets for the Luftwaffe to attack during the day. But as I jumped out of the car and looked up I saw it was our friend, the army flier, from the farm at Tebourba. He had made his escape, too, and was hedge-hopping defiantly across the valley.

Then, as I examined our surroundings, I noticed that we were camped next to a formation of American tanks, which were camouflaged in the olive grove and among some cactus on the roadside edge of it. They apparently had arrived during the night as reinforcements to make up for the tank losses already being suffered by Blade Force. The American crews were be-

ginning to shuffle about, preparing their breakfasts, cleaning the guns on the tanks and awaiting orders for the day's fighting. The early morning reconnaissance reports had not been circulated yet.

Stoneman, King, and I finally learned that the road to Medjez-el-Bab was "believed to be clear, except perhaps for a few snipers," so we decided to take a chance and dash back to Divisional Headquarters to send our stories. It was clear that the First Army was on the defensive now, hoping somehow to check the German counter-attack, but not knowing exactly where a successful stand could be made. The main body of tanks and infantry had been left behind in the general area of Tebourba with a vague hope that they might defeat the Germans before they could break through and overrun the Allied forces.

Major Rosen started to come with us, but as we drove by the American tanks he saw an old friend of his and decided to stay behind with him. As we stopped to let him out and say good-by, some German tanks were reported prowling around in the neighborhood. Major Rosen's friend, who was commanding the American tanks, ordered two men, with a special anti-tank grenade rifle, to go in a jeep to investigate the tanks. I don't know whether they ever returned, but if they did I'm sure they can count themselves very lucky to be alive. It seemed an extraordinarily foolish way to meet German tanks, but at that time neither the Americans nor the British had had enough battle experience to know better.

The first few minutes of our drive to Medjez-el-Bab and beyond to headquarters near the tiny village of Oued Zarga were almost as exciting as some of the moments of the previous day at Tebourba. We sped along the road, past the wreckages of several American and British vehicles which had been blown up or set afire by strafing planes or snipers—we didn't know which—and finally, almost as if to satisfy our expectations, someone sniped at us. There was a sharp crack to our left and a bullet sang across the hood of the car. Stoneman pressed harder on the

accelerator and we plunged crazily forward until we met some American soldiers beside the road. They were very excited and talked grimly of "a whole lot of Limey bodies all around here." One of them leaped onto the running board of the car and asked us to take him a few hundred yards along the road to his unit. He was just as excited as the rest of his comrades.

"This is my first battle, but boy, oh, boy, I want to get back to my wife," he shouted, and grinned. His accent identified him unmistakably as a New Yorker, probably from Brooklyn. "I was only married ten days before I came here . . ." Whatever else he had to say was lost as he jumped off the car and ran into a field where his unit was waiting for orders.

As we got out of the danger zone—that is, out of the area in which everyone knew the Germans were dropping parachutists as snipers to harass traffic on the roads—we settled back in the car and realized how lucky we were to be safe again. We thought that our farm at Tebourba had proved a sort of monument in our small share of the battle and we ought to give it a name.

"Stuka Acres," King suggested.

Later, I heard that "Stuka Acres" was leveled that day by shells from the German tanks on the ridge.

Our personal escape in no way marked the end of the First Army's struggle to break the German counter-attack. The retreat of the Northhamptons, and of us, was a sort of rout. We had fled because we were helpless to fight back. The rest of the brigade and Blade Force fell back slowly, fighting all the way and counter-attacking frequently on "a local scale."

The battle became a series of "King of the Mountain" contests, with both sides fighting small but violent battles for every point along the two ridges banking the valley between Tebourba and Medjez-el-Bab.

It was an unequal battle, however. The Germans had a slight superiority in numbers of men and tanks, but the factors that counted most were experience—and the famous German 88-mm.

gun. The two forces were really too small, and the battleground was too big, to enable either side to try to fight a large-scale battle. Additionally, the Germans, realizing the lack of experience from which their opponents were suffering, persisted in infiltrating among the hills in small but well-armed units and this forced the Americans and British to scatter their strength.

For a week the Allied retreat continued. The fact that they fought a week to retire about twenty miles shows how slowly and stubbornly they withdrew. On December seventh I drove up the Médjez-el-Bab-Tebourba road to a little railroad station, about halfway to Tebourba, called Bordj Toun, to see how things were going. The Germans were on the hills on either side of the Allied troops and were shelling them and mortar-ing them steadily but not very accurately. The Luftwaffe was also continuing its steady, relentless pounding—and getting little more opposition from the ground than before. The American Combat Command B had gotten into “the line,” such as it was, but was unable to brace it sufficiently. As a matter of fact, it was preparing to move back that night.

When the First Army finally got back to Medjez-el-Bab, the brigade had suffered heavy casualties. Blade Force, which went into battle with about thirty tanks, came back with many less. The losses were quickly made good, however, but not until it was too late to do anything but try to keep the Germans out of Medjez-el-Bab.

These losses were due chiefly to the lack of experience of the Allied troops and tank crews. I have since heard generals say that the greatest weakness to be overcome in “green” troops is their “incredible bravery.” They don’t know what they can do and what they can’t do, and they hate to think that there is anything they can’t do. As a result, they try to do impossible feats and suffer heavy, unnecessary casualties. Apparently, no amount of training and maneuvers can prevent this. They must learn for themselves in actual battle.

This lack of first-hand experience also was responsible largely

for the great success the Germans had with their 88-mm. guns. Actually, the gun should not have proven such a decisive weapon, because the Germans did nothing with it that they hadn't done in the Western Desert against the Eighth Army. I'm afraid one serious mistake on the Allied side was that intelligence information based on the Eighth Army's experiences with the 88 was never forced upon the American and British tank crews.

One day, shortly after the battle of Tebourba, I talked to several American tank crews who were standing by their shell-punctured General Grants and Honeys in a field workshop near Oued Zarga. All the tanks had been wrecked by 88's and the men who had been fighting with them seemed utterly bewildered by the deadliness and accuracy of the German gunners. It was no secret to anyone who had read even newspaper stories about the fighting in the Western Desert, but these young men had been taken completely by surprise.

Corporal Harold Colgin, from LaHarpe, Kansas, told me how he had been ordered to take his tank up a hill and drive some German tanks off the hill. The Germans seemed, apparently, to be coming over the hill in considerable force. "As I got near the ridge," Colgin said, "I saw six or eight of their tanks and I opened fire immediately. I know I hit at least one, because it caught on fire. But then, suddenly, one of their 88's cut loose on us and hit my 75 and knocked the barrel out of action. We started to back up, but another 88 hit the front of the tank. It killed my sergeant. Then a couple of more shells hit us and we were driving practically blind. I don't know how we did it, but we maneuvered back into the valley and got into our bivouac. We were hit three times on the way back by a smaller gun."

Private Sam Galletti, from Dallas, Pennsylvania, had a somewhat similar experience. He was with three tanks which had pulled up onto a ridge and turned off their engines to listen and try to see what was happening. (It's one of the rules of tank fighting that tanks never halt on top of a ridge where their silhouettes present perfect targets.) "All of a sudden, two tanks were

hit and the men started jumping out of them," he said. "Boy, I never saw anyone move as fast as those fellows did. They started running down the hill. Two or three of them were wounded and had to be carried. They were hit by machine-gun fire as they got out of the tanks."

Private Louis Robotnick, a tank gunner from Dorchester, Massachusetts, described how his tanks had gone out to intercept enemy tanks and had found themselves suddenly between German and British tanks. "A couple of 88's were behind us," he said. "There were three American tanks in my formation and the 88's started blasting at us. The first two shots got two tanks. The next four just missed mine, but only because we were four or five feet lower on the slope than the others."

The Americans had not learned yet the secret of tank warfare, at least as it ultimately was worked out in Libya. There, Rommel's Afrika Korps and the Eighth Army discovered that tanks should be fought with anti-tank guns—not with tanks. Tanks should only be used to lure enemy tanks into range of guns. That's just what the Germans did around Tebourba. I remember hearing the story of fifteen American tanks which met three German tanks coming toward them on a road. The German tanks immediately turned and "fled," with the Americans chasing them. The Germans turned off the road and crossed a field—near a cluster of cactus. The Americans followed, apparently ignoring the cactus. Suddenly, the cactus seemed to blossom open, like a giant flower, and the muzzles of several 88's flashed. Several of the American tanks were knocked out.

Perhaps these are not very kind things to report about American soldiers. But they are true, and I think they are necessary to any understanding of the early struggles of the First Army. The British soldiers had many of the same sort of experiences, but I honestly feel that they were not guilty of as many blunders as the Americans were. The British troops, actually, were better trained; they had been training for a much longer time, and many of them had fought before in France and knew something

about war. The Americans had never fought and knew nothing about war except what they had read and what they had been told. Textbook lessons are never the same as battle lessons.

Another weakness which showed itself among the Americans was the inferiority of many officers. They lacked the necessary qualities of leadership, especially in "tight places." The officers, as far as I ever was able to observe, were subject almost to as much panic as the men under their command, whenever the battle reached a critical stage that demanded quick and firm initiative. However, like the problems of tank tactics, those problems can only be solved through experience in battle. Sufficient training and "intelligence tests" are certainly important in the creation of good officers, but they are not everything. An officer must be able to lead his men through any sort of trial, and he must be a leader that men will follow without questioning his orders. A soldier is not supposed to think about whether the orders he is given are right or wrong.

The Allies' inability to cope with the power of the Luftwaffe was another vital factor in the loss of the "Tunis gamble." But I'm sure there is no way to blame anyone for any of the three most obvious reasons for this condition.

First, there were only two peacetime air fields—at Bône and Souk-el-Arba—in this part of northern Tunisia. Except for the valley stretching about ten miles east of Souk-el-Arba to the area of Souk-el-Khemis, there was almost no ground flat enough to establish improvised air fields—at least, not quickly. That whole valley was made into one great air field later. This acute shortage of air-field space forced the Allied fighters to operate from bases fifty to seventy-five miles from the front. The Germans were operating from fields twenty to thirty-five or forty miles from the front.

Second, the weather turned consistently against the Allies, and, as a result, favored the Luftwaffe. At that time, there were only two all-weather air fields, with the necessary concrete runways, in all French North Africa. They were at Tunis and Bi-

zerte, the Luftwaffe's two main air bases. Whenever it rained, the air fields at Bône and Souk-el-Arba turned overnight into masses of glue-like mud. The Lightnings and Spitfires and Hurricane bombers simply could not take off or land. They just sank into the mud. . . . Eventually, the R.A.F. delivered metal nets, which were laid out as runways, but still the planes could not venture off the runways, for dispersal between operations, because of the mud. It was a problem which required weeks of hard work by special engineers and tons of special equipment.

Third, the Allies did not have the massive anti-aircraft gun-power to make dive-bombing too costly for the Germans to continue. The only answer to dive-bombing, except for constant fighter patrols, lies in the concentration of light anti-aircraft guns around all important targets. For nearly four years of war, the British have argued violently for and against the dive-bomber as an offensive weapon. The group opposing the dive-bomber have argued, successfully so far, that it is no good against "a determined man with a bren-gun." The fact as stated—that one man can hold off a dive-bomber attack—probably is wrong, but I do believe the theory is right. I have seen a single concentration of bren-guns and machine guns shoot down three out of six Junkers 88's in one attack. But in the early days of the First Army's career everything was spread so thinly, because there so many targets to try to defend, that nothing was defended strongly enough to ward off the Stukas and Messerschmitts.

All these mistakes and difficulties are easy to see when you are on the battlefield. But most of them are difficult to anticipate, particularly when the late-November rush for Tunis probably never would have been attempted, even, if the landings at Algiers and Oran and Casablanca had not been so successful. They are, most of them, mistakes and difficulties of a "green" army. And the First Army was an amateur army, fighting an opponent who had been building a war machine for nearly ten years and fighting with it and improving on it for three years.

The First Army did not falter, even when every day seemed to threaten something worse than the day before. I remember the days around the middle of December, when the British and American forces holding Medjez-el-Bab had very little with which to ward off any determined German assault. Everything was in readiness to fall back again, into the hills between Medjez-el-Bab and Beja. Those troops, who had a few Frenchmen at their side, beat off several sharp German attacks, including one by thirty-eight tanks, and they held firm.

### CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

NOVEMBER saw the British First Army scramble wildly for Tunis and almost win it, but December and January were months of maddening frustration, the hardest sort of slogging and living, and some of the most disheartening disappointments. But with all that, those two months saw the First Army begin to develop and grow into one of the best the Allies possessed. The process began in that period, but actually wasn't completed until April. Many thousands of British and American soldiers died or were badly wounded in that gruesome, but necessary, transition of inexperienced boys into an army of tough, shrewd veterans. The men of the First Army, and the Americans who were gradually withdrawn from the organization of the First Army itself, learned that fighting is the only way to learn to fight.

At the same time, the vast mechanical organization of the British and American forces began to take a shape that simply never existed in the early days. The trucks and guns and tanks and airplanes and ammunition, and even the items that the layman rarely imagines as part of a military expedition—telephone wires, bulldozers, soap, spare parts for all the vehicles and weapons, toothbrushes, razors, water cans and gasoline cans

and boots and socks—began to flow on a colossal scale. The Allied forces were growing into a single machine which could be wielded without fear of something going wrong simply because some seemingly unimportant item wasn't within easy reach. I remember a moment in November when a tank attack had to be postponed because someone had neglected or forgotten to supply grease for the tanks. It had to be flown to the front from Algiers.

The first heroes of the campaign were the men of the Hampshire regiment. Their feat, which I think was never matched in the North African campaign, did not become known until the end of the first week in December. They had relieved my friends of the Northamptonshire regiment in the fighting for Djedeida and they took the brunt of the German counter-attack all the way back to Medjez-el-Bab. They went into the line in front of Djedeida on November 29. Before they were relieved, near Medjez-el-Bab, they had only a few left. But against that, they had the first Victoria Cross decoration in the North African campaign. The V.C., the highest award for gallantry in the British forces, was given posthumously to Major "Pat" Le-Patourel. He had led repeated infantry charges against impossible odds and had disappeared. Everyone was convinced that he was dead, but soon after his award had been approved, his family in England received a letter from him in a hospital in Italy where he was recovering from wounds. I believe it was the only posthumous V.C. ever given to a living soldier.

When they were fighting their way back from Djedeida and Tebourba, the Hampshires were cut off from their supplies almost from the start. They were hit repeatedly by German tanks—the Hampshires had no tanks—and by numerically superior German infantry. Once, they were attacked by sixty-five tanks. On December 3, they went into Tebourba, hoping to get more precise orders from brigade headquarters, but they found the town had been abandoned and they were on their own. Behind them, the road was cut by German machine-gunners and tanks

lying in the hills overlooking the road. Their casualties already had been very severe and they were no longer an effective fighting force. But their commander was determined that they should escape to reorganize, re-equip, and get reinforcements to fight again. He ordered all the survivors to arm themselves with rifles, automatic weapons, grenades and ammunition taken from the supplies of their wounded comrades and from the bodies of their dead. It was a question of fighting their way through the Germans with nothing more than they could carry on their backs or stuff into the big pockets of their uniforms. Their commander told them to split up into groups of two or three men each, grab what food and water they could find in stranded vehicles and head for Medjez-el-Bab.

On December 4, the battalion's medical officer, quartermaster officer and chaplain, who had left the front earlier, started to gather the last survivors together in a wood five miles northeast of Medjez-el-Bab. For two days, the little parties appeared, one by one, out of the hills through which they had crawled and walked and fought. I don't suppose anyone knows yet how many were killed and how many were wounded during those eight days and nights, but the important thing, as far as all the Allied forces were concerned, was that the battalion never lagged in its spirit and never faltered in its determination to get back to fight again.

The Americans of C.C.B., a combat command from the First Armored Division, were moved into the battle to stiffen the Allied defenses. The brigade had been cut viciously, and if it had not been for the Americans, the line in front of Medjez-el-Bab might never have been held. However, on December 5, intelligence information showed that the Germans were reinforcing in the Tebourba area. The next day, they attacked toward Medjez-el-Bab with a fury and a violence which matched anything they had displayed before. They hit out against the weak, tired remnants of the brigade and C.C.B. men with tanks, heavy machine-guns and mortars. It was decided that the Allies could

not hold their line and would be compelled to withdraw behind Medjez-el-Bab. The British engineers laid mines all around and in the town until one of their officers described the whole area as "one bloody great mine."

Plans were made for a general withdrawal to regroup the forces which had been in the fighting for most of the past month and to find suitable places for the new units which were beginning to arrive. However, on December 8, British patrols, thrusting into the German positions in the hills at night and snatching prisoners out of the darkness, reported indications that the Germans also were planning to pull back. The British and Americans apparently had fought them to a standstill without realizing it. At the same time, as those patrols came back to their headquarters early that morning, they were drenched with rain. The rain storms which were to become so famous to the world for the way in which they soaked the north Tunisian mountains and valleys, had begun. After the first few hours of this opening storm, the whole battle area and everything for miles behind it became a mass of thick, glue-like mud. Movement was impossible except on the slippery paved roads. It was impossible to get heavy vehicles and tanks from the muddy fields onto the roads, or, if they were on the roads, to get them far enough off them for safety, in dispersal, from air attack.

The Germans obviously were in much the same predicament, although their superiority in the air made the weather less of a determining factor. However, they made no immediate effort to exploit their advantage and on December 9, General Anderson decided to abandon his plans for withdrawal behind Medjez-el-Bab. The town, he ordered, was to be held "at all costs." Just as this order went out, the Germans took advantage of a sunny day and sent thirty-eight tanks rolling along the two roads from Tebourba and Tunis to attack the town.

It was a crucial day in the campaign. Light American tanks went out into the rolling Tunis plain to fight the heavily armed German Mark Fours and Mark Threes. Most of the American

tanks were knocked out by the Germans, who plowed forward. A French crew of a French seventy-five-millimeter gun, World War I vintage, guarding one of the approaches to the town, knocked out four or five tanks and ended its role in the battle with one officer loading and firing the gun alone while his dozen comrades lay dead or wounded around him. Late in the afternoon, the Germans simply turned around and went back to their bases. I think everyone was bewildered by the German withdrawal. It just didn't make sense, because the town's defenses were being slowly beaten down and they never had been strong enough to withstand an assault of such proportions. Apparently the Germans thought the defenses were stronger than they were. They called the operation a "reconnaissance in force," a term often used to minimize disappointment over the failure of an attack.

That seemed to be the end of the German counter-offensive. Gradually, it was assumed that they were content with the progress they had made; that is, they thought any further advance would cost them more than they were prepared to pay. At the same time, they had established themselves, in that last thirty-eight-tank attack, on the hill six miles north of Medjez-el-Bab which soon became famous as "Longstop Hill." The name of that six-hundred-foot-high hill, which served the Germans for so long as a sort of "Tobruk" menacing the British spearhead, was attributed variously to men with a liking for cricket—Longstop is the name of a position on a cricket team—and to a somewhat cynical group which regarded the hill as the last obstacle blocking the way to Tunis.

In the north, on the narrow road that winds through the choppy, rugged hills from Tabarka to Mateur and Bizerte, the brigade had been blocked by three hills which were called "Green Hill," "Bald Hill" and "Conical Hill." Their names were obvious and unimaginative. They rose from the dirt roadside and the guns and mortars which the Germans dug into them seemed to make the pass impregnable. It was impregnable, too, for a long

time—impregnable at least to the small-scale attacks which were the only sort of attacks that the brigade could mount. The troops there scarcely were able to move in daylight because the Germans, sitting on the peaks overlooking them, saw every move they made. And whenever they saw any activity, they telephoned to the guns and mortars on the eastern slopes and a moment later heavy shells and mortar bombs were crashing among the British troops.

The brigade's first encounter with those three hills had come early in December when an attack toward Mateur and Bizerte had been helped by a landing from the sea behind the German lines by some of my commando friends. They had jumped ashore from assault craft east of Cape Serrat and wandered through the hills, raiding German positions, shooting up German supply columns and generally disorganizing the German rear areas. Captain John Bradford, who had taken me into Fort Sidi Ferruch, led his troops all the way to the airdrome four miles from Bizerte and shot up several airplanes on the ground. He was wounded mortally in a wild skirmish in the hills, but he continued to direct his troops in a withdrawal until he died three hours later. With his last words, as he was being carried back on a crudely improvised stretcher, he turned over his command to his second-in-command, told him to "get the men back safely," and died. He was buried there in the hills. His men paid him the greatest tribute they knew how—they agreed that they would always be known as "Bradford's Troop," regardless of who commanded them. They had stayed among the German positions for about seventy-two hours and started the long, tortuous march through the hills toward Tabarka only when they ran out of food and ammunition. They had performed their role in the northern drive with amazing boldness, but the drive itself failed because Green Hill and Bald Hill had become to the brigade what the nameless hills in front of Djedeida had been to the other brigade. The Germans had picked their "final stand" positions and held them with a fury and determination, which, how-

ever disappointing and deadly they may have been to the Allies, nevertheless represented an admirable job of soldiery.

In the middle of December, activity along most of the front degenerated into nervous patrolling while General Anderson moved more troops and tanks into the line around Medjez-el-Bab. His reinforcements included the whole of the British Sixth Armored Division, equipped, however, only with lightly gunned Valentine and Crusader tanks. An American Combat Team, from the famous First Infantry Division, also moved into the front. Several units which had been doing most of the fighting and had suffered heavy casualties, were shifted behind the front to regroup and refit. In the back of General Anderson's mind was a plan for one more attempt to take Tunis. He thought everything would be ready by Christmas.

The Sixth Armored Division was concentrated in the valley below the hillside village of Tebourouk, south of Medjez-el-Bab. It could move easily, as far as geography was concerned, into the Medjez-el-Bab area and then swing east toward Tunis. But its tanks were woefully under-gunned, most of them mounting nothing bigger than two-pounders. Ever since the campaign had begun, the shortage of infantry had been acute. It was better now, but still there was not enough to inspire complete confidence. There were only thirty-five miles to go along the main Tunis road, through Massicault, but everyone was convinced that the Germans were going to fight for every one of those miles.

The importance of Longstop Hill, with its steep, rocky slopes, was obvious. It commanded not only the Medjez-el-Bab area but the road to Tebourba, which the First Army had to control to guard the flank of the direct thrust to Tunis. This meant that Longstop had to be taken—and exploited—before the main blow fell. The plan called for the Coldstream Guards, with what then was regarded as heavy artillery support, to take Longstop. The American Combat Team was to take over the hill from them and exploit it with a thrust toward Tebourba clearing the hills on either side of the Medjerda River. The Northamptonshires

were to climb along the highest ridges northwest of the valley. They and the Americans were to hold a line just west of Tebourba to make certain that the Germans could not pounce into Medjez-el-Bab and destroy the main base of the tanks. The Coldstream and the Grenadier Guards were to join the tanks and help the Irish Brigade in the tasks of armored infantry.

The Coldstream launched their attack on Longstop on the night of December 23. They gained most of the hill, but the Germans showed they wanted the hill, too. They counter-attacked before the Coldstream could consolidate their positions and drove them down to the foot of the hill. The Coldstream counter-attacked themselves and fought their way about half way up. It wasn't enough, but it was a start, and they held on through the next day under violent mortar and machine-gun fire. Late that night, another fierce rainstorm broke over the front. Soon, the Northamptonshires had lost contact with their headquarters because their radio sets were smashed when the mules carrying them had slipped on the muddy tracks and tumbled down the hillsides. The battalion pressed forward, however, determined to carry out its part of the attack according to the original plan.

On Christmas Eve, Stoneman, Middleton and Bill White, of the *New York Herald-Tribune*, and I went to Medjez-el-Bab to spend the night with the American troops at the front. We thought it would be a festive night. We didn't know that the battle was the beginning of a push for Tunis.

It was a dismal afternoon when we set out, after lunch, and we knew it would be a worse night. Rain was pelting down out of the gray sky. The narrow, paved road was slippery with water and a thin coating of mud which had been splashed onto it by military trucks and cars careening on and off the muddy shoulders. The wheels of cars in front of us swirled mud onto our windshield and our windshield-wiper didn't work. We had to stop every mile or so to wipe the mud off the windshield in order to see.

Just before 5 P. M., we reached the road fork west of Medjez-

el-Bab and stopped to ask how the battle was going, and where we could find some Americans. All the troops in the area were being juggled almost daily and it was difficult to know who was where. A British captain was standing in the mud beside the road looking out over the dark, muddy valley. The collar of his greatcoat was turned up to keep the rain off his neck. We gave him a drink of a bottle of Christmas whiskey Stoneman was carrying and he began to think it wasn't such a bad Christmas Eve after all.

"Stay here with me for a few minutes," he said, looking at his watch. "This is probably the best place to see the party."

We didn't know that any "party" was scheduled, beyond fairly desperate attempts at a gay Christmas Eve, and he explained that the heaviest artillery barrage in the Tunisian campaign, to date, was about to start. It was to open up at 5 P. M. and last for twenty-four minutes, with something like 2,000 shells of various sizes being hurled upon Longstop Hill.

Longstop Hill was a great black blob rising out of the valley about six miles away and merging into the range of hills banking the western side of the Medjerda Valley. We knew that strong German infantry positions were scattered all over Longstop. Nothing, however, was visible. It never was until the soldiers got onto the hill and found bullets splattering them from every angle. That was one of the disconcerting factors about the place. However, aerial photographs and night patrols had disclosed the location of the main enemy positions and the British and American guns were going to pound them with shells. I remember we calculated that about 750 shells were going to be fired into one area only 100 yards by 125 yards. After the artillery bombardment, the Coldstream were going to storm the hill in a last, desperate effort to wrest it from the Germans. The big push for Tunis had been postponed for forty-eight hours because of the rain. It was hoped that the rain would stop and the ground would dry and harden enough to allow the tanks to move.

Promptly at 5 P. M., the guns opened up. I forget how many

guns were there, but it seemed an impressive number to us. Actually, it was only a fraction of the concentrations of four hundred and five hundred guns which were used later.

The valley was a great sea of brown, slushy mud, dotted with clusters of trees, which were turning greener and greener with the rain, and tiny, white farmhouses. Suddenly, the yellow flashes of the guns blinked nervously and the booming began. The whole valley seemed to shake in this eruption of gun power. I had never seen anything like it, nor had Stoneman or Middleton or White. The guns flashed from every cluster of trees. The shells shrieked through the rain and the clouds, and burst silently on the slopes of Longstop, with gray puffs of smoke adding an artistic touch against the black background. The whole valley roared and shook in what seemed to be a single convulsion for twenty-four minutes.

As the guns ceased firing at 5:24 p. m., almost as suddenly as they had started, we knew the infantry already were getting in among the Germans. At the same time, the German artillery opened its counter-battery fire. We noticed the flashes of a few guns on the hill, looking like tiny sparks, and thought at first they were firing at the infantry. The first I realized that it was counter-battery fire was when I heard the shells whistle near our little group of spectators. Then I saw the smoke of shell-bursts a couple of hundred yards from us and realized that the shells were exploding in the ground even before we heard their whistle. There was a convenient hole near us and we all jumped into it. Of course, the bottom of it was ankle-deep with mud, but the protection it offered made us pass off the discomfort with only a few angry curses. Stoneman's bottle helped, too. There was a curious fascination in seeing the explosions of the shells and then hearing their shriek as they ripped the air. Actually, we should have been in a safe area, and the fact that the German shells were plummeting around us meant only that the gunners were firing very badly. About fifteen shells burst near us and then the Germans corrected their aim. They began laying them among

the trees where their observers, lying on the top of Longstop, had seen the flashes of our guns.

When we thought it was safe to climb out of our hole, we began looking for signs of the infantry battle. Streaks of red tracer bullets from machine-guns criss-crossed in a lovely but vicious pattern of what is technically called "cross-fire." We watched the progress of the Coldstream by noting the rising level of those thin streaks of red dots. They seemed almost to march up the black hillside as the soldiers fought their way through the defenses. The first sign of success was a white Very light which rocketed suddenly and gracefully from the battlefield and across the black backdrop of the hill. It was the signal for "First Objective Achieved."

It was a weird sensation to watch a battle which we really couldn't see. Nor could we hear anything after the Allied artillery stopped. All we could see was the tracer bullets and the sparking of the bigger guns, which we assumed were 88-millimeter guns because of their high velocity.

We finally found our American soldiers with whom we had planned to spend a festive Christmas Eve. But they turned out to be the crews of some of the guns we had been watching. And they scarcely knew it was Christmas. They were too tired and wet and muddy to appreciate that this was the first Christmas for American troops in the European Theater of Operations. It seemed historic to us, but not to them. We met several of them in the railroad station just north of Medjez-el-Bab, where there was a British headquarters and where we scrounged a hot meal. The American gunners, unlike most of their comrades in the rear areas, hadn't even made any plans for Christmas. The weather, and the fact that they were in the front line, had discouraged them from thoughts of merriment. I think Stoneman's fast-emptying bottle gave them more cheer than they ever expected to get. The pity of it was that the bottle didn't last long enough for anyone to have more than one nip.

In a way, however, the war seemed far away. Occasionally,

we stepped out of the main station building onto the freight platform to watch for more Very lights on Longstop. At the same time, I talked to several American officers and enlisted men—youngsters from New York, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Ohio and Tennessee—and they were all thinking of home. They showed me photographs of their parents, their wives or sweethearts and children. One of them had never seen his child and I felt sorry for him when he looked at the photograph and said, "This is all I can do—just look at the little fellow's picture." They all begged me to send messages to their people and I agreed to include some of them in a story.

Meanwhile, the Coldstream seemed to be making steady progress up the muddy, shrub-covered slopes of Longstop. Our story seemed to be rounded off with a successful Christmas Eve attack. We decided to go back to Fifth Corps Headquarters, near Souk-el-Khemis, where we were living, to send our stories on the army teletype wire. The ride back was one of the most terrifying I ever made, because we could not use our headlights and it was almost impossible to see the road. We got back about 2 A. M., wrote our stories and White and I went out again through the darkness and the mud to headquarters. We were thoroughly exhausted, largely from the driving of the afternoon and night, when we finally fell onto our makeshift beds just before dawn.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

THAT night, the American Combat Team moved onto Longstop to relieve the Coldstream and prepare for its march toward Tebourba. There was a great deal of confusion in the darkness. The Coldstream thought—wrongly—that they had driven all the Germans off the hill. Some of them were still lying low, awaiting a chance to pounce. The Coldstream began to move out while the Americans were trying to settle themselves in positions. This

settling down process, which was extremely difficult and hazardous because none of the Americans ever had had a chance to study the ground, was suddenly broken up by a violent German counter-attack. The Americans found themselves caught completely off-balance. They tried to hang on with fierce desperation but the Germans had every advantage. They knew the ground and they still had several gun positions which had not been touched in the earlier fighting. The Americans fought all Christmas Day, always with the Germans attacking down on them. Finally, after the Americans had lost about fifty per cent of their men, they were compelled to retreat. Their task—a night relief on ground completely strange to them—was, I think, almost impossible. They probably made a lot of mistakes—everyone made mistakes in those days—but I'm certain they learned a great deal about fighting.

This defeat, combined with the continuation of the rain, forced General Anderson to abandon his whole plan for attacking Tunis at that time. When the rain ceased a couple of days later and the sun and wind began to dry the battleground, we learned another lesson of the Tunisian campaign. We learned that a week of hot sun and strong wind only hardened the surface crust of the ground and left the earth beneath that crust as soggy and sticky as before. Three-ton trucks and gun-carriers could move easily on the hard surface, but tanks, weighing anything up to thirty tons, broke the crust and bogged down in the mud beneath it.

I have never met anyone who was scheduled to fight in that Christmas offensive, or who did fight in its preparatory battles, who is convinced that it would have succeeded. Although General Anderson had numerical superiority in tanks, he suffered from a definite inferiority in quality. The two-pounder guns of the Crusaders and Valentines were no match for the much heavier guns of the German Mark Threes and Mark Fours. But the greatest weakness in General Anderson's force was the shortage of infantry. Scrapping together every soldier he could

find, he still had considerably less than a division—and I'm sure that would never have been enough to work offensively with the tanks and at the same time hold and consolidate ground which the tanks won.

Looking back on those days, I think luck was on the Allied side. Had the rain started forty-eight hours later, the big attack probably would have been in full swing, with the tanks fighting across the Tunis plain. A sudden downpour and the quick transformation of the battleground into a mass of mud would have paralyzed the whole offensive machine and it probably would have been wiped out. In that case, I believe General Anderson might have been compelled to flee to the hills west of Medjez-el-Bab and the next ordeal—the building-up of an attacking force of overwhelming strength—would have been much more difficult.

General Anderson then switched his attention from the Médjez-el-Bab front to the hills farther north in the neighborhood of Jefna Station. The Germans were holding those hills with strong forces of men dug into deep, excellently camouflaged holes and equipped with heavy machine-guns and mortars, all placed so that they could lay down a screen of cross-fire which seemed impenetrable. Green Hill and Bald Hill and Conical Hill formed a screen protecting Mateur, a few miles to the southeast, and Bizerte, to the northeast. But the Brigade, which was ordered to attack Green Hill and Conical Hill, with the help of a few commandos and parachutists, could have no hope of driving through to either of those vital towns. The forces available were too few to do more than occupy the hills. As it turned out, they were too few—many too few—even to take and hold the hills.

The attack began just before dawn on January 5. The two important weapons which the British had for the first time were airplanes and artillery. They never had had enough planes to give them constant protection from the Luftwaffe. A heavy concentration of artillery had been slipped into the area at night and dug into gun pits and camouflaged from aerial observation.

However, because the Germans were on the hilltops looking down on the British positions, the flashes of the guns enabled the Germans to pin-point their positions, once the battle opened, and to throw back accurate counter-battery fire. The only thing they couldn't do was bomb the guns.

Fifth Corps Headquarters insisted, at the start, that the battle was only on a small scale and unimportant. They were waiting, obviously, to see how it developed. Hopes had been raised, and shattered, too often and everyone in an authoritative position at the front was trying to discourage any more disappointments.

Stoneman and I went up to the front on the morning of January 6, after Corps had announced a victory. The Germans, they said, had been pushed off Green Hill and Conical Hill and the British troops were awaiting a counter-attack. They were confident—so Corps reported—that their positions were strong enough to hold off any German effort to retrieve the vital hills. Stoneman and I raced, as fast as the Ford would race, along the winding road from Beja (the Luftwaffe bombed Beja three minutes after we went through it) to Djebel Abiod and through Sedjanane to a hill which had been no-man's-land only a few hours before.

But by the time we got to the battle, it was finished—in another whipping for the brave but small British forces. The troops were trudging along the dirt road, exhausted, dirty and beaten. They had been hit and mauled and were lucky to be alive and able to fight again. Stoneman said they looked exactly like the men he had seen retreating in France in front of the overwhelming power of the German attack there. This retreat, through the hills of Tunisia, seemed to be a miniature France. The troops probably had a deeper bitterness here, however, than they did in France. There, they were able to understand, somewhat vaguely, the lack of man-power and fire-power. But here, they knew little of the gigantic administrative difficulties behind their lines.

"They plastered us with mortars and brought up five heavy

machine-guns to our one," an unshaven, red-eyed soldier told us. "We were just out-gunned and outnumbered. Bullets were flying all over the place and we never could get away from them. If we had had more men we could have held those hills permanently. Our artillery was wonderful. Those lads laid down their shells wherever we asked them to—and quickly, too. We just told them where to fire and in a few minutes, down came the shells. We couldn't ask for better artillery support. Our air cover was perfect, too. We have seen nothing but German planes around here for a month, but yesterday and today we've had Spitfires and Hurricanes swarming over us all the time. We couldn't ask for anything better in artillery and air cover, but we certainly needed more men and more machine-guns and mortars."

With the exception of the artillery and air cover, this began to look like all the other heart-breaking battles of the campaign. A British officer analyzed it this way: "If we had attacked with a brigade on each hill and a third brigade in reserve, we'd still be there. But we tried to do the whole thing with a couple of small battalions. It just doesn't seem worth the effort and sacrifice. We've lost a lot of men."

A commando officer, who had led one hundred and twenty men onto Conical Hill and had lost sixty of them trying to throw back the counter-attack, complained bitterly about the Brigade's failure to give him reinforcements when he asked for them. "We got onto the hill fairly easily," he said. "The Germans hardly fought at all. But then when we were digging in we could see them in the little valley below us getting ready to counter-attack. They were shuffling all around, gathering their equipment and concentrating. I was sure they were coming at us with about two hundred and fifty men and the usual batch of machine-guns. I knew I couldn't hold them off for long and told Brigade what I knew the situation was. I told them I had to have reinforcements both in men and guns, but especially machine-guns." The officer looked even more bitter and disappointed than he sounded.

"They sent me one bren-gun team. What good is one extra bren-gun against a lot of machine-guns?"

A couple of days later I heard what had happened on Green Hill. The story was told to me in Souk-el-Khemis by Major David Dobie, commanding a British parachute company which had captured, and been thrown off, the hill. Major Dobie is twenty-nine years old and likes to remember that he captured the first German prisoner for the B.E.F. in France in 1939. He told his story with a deep feeling of emotion and with more details than I have ever heard from a British officer. Usually, their traditional under-statement is so extreme that they refuse to appreciate the immense drama of what they are doing. I wish I could remember his story in his own words. I can only tell it from memory, helped by notes I made as he talked.

His was another story of a defeat but, somehow, it seemed to symbolize the sort of tough fighting against terrific odds that was raging all through those months of creating an army and "blooding" it for the final battle. With only ninety men, Major Dobie had routed over two hundred and fifty Germans from Green Hill and had fought in pitch darkness for three and a half hours to hold it. He was forced to retreat only because he ran out of ammunition and a breakdown in his radio communications prevented him from calling for reinforcements.

The parachutists were in reserve ~~when~~ the battle began. Other British troops had seized the forward slopes of the hill when Major Dobie was ordered to "pass through" them and take the top.

"We got our orders to move up to the hill at 4 P. M. on January 5," Dobie began. "When we got there, at the bottom of the slope, we were given an intelligence report on the dispositions and strength of the enemy and were ordered to attack the hill at 1 A. M. that night, or rather the next morning. We were to have a half-hour artillery barrage, before we moved in, so that we could be sure the enemy were in their holes when we started our attack. Before the artillery started, we climbed the hill—it was a veri-

table cliff—for a mile and a half. We were only three hundred yards from the enemy's main positions when the guns opened up at twelve-thirty.

"I wanted to move forward immediately, and get closer to them, but just then four of our shells landed right among my men. Fortunately, nobody was hurt, but I decided it was too risky to go farther forward until the guns stopped. When I did push on, the moment the guns quit, the Germans heard us as soon as we started to move. It was impossible to be absolutely quiet, because our boots and tin hats were hitting rocks and scratching on the brush. The night was pitch black and we couldn't see anything except the very faintest outline of shadows. We had never even seen any aerial photographs of the hill and our maps didn't show all the contours. We were really almost blind because we knew nothing except that we had to get onto the top of the hill and throw the Germans off. It was a bloody business.

"I planned to go along a line to their flank, to draw their fire so that I could see what their defenses were, and then roll them up along the ridge of the hill from north to south. Our reports on their strength indicated there was only one machine-gun post and a few snipers on top of the hill. At five minutes after one, just as we were crawling up the hill, we drew our first fire. It was a hell of a shock, because, almost before I knew what was happening, I counted nine light and heavy and medium machine-guns firing on us, all on fixed lines. We hadn't fired a shot, because I knew they couldn't see us well enough to fire with any accuracy. But this new situation forced me to change my plan. I sent one platoon to try to get around the Germans' left flank and another to get around their right flank. I took my third platoon to try a frontal attack against the center of their positions.

"Tracer bullets were whizzing all over us, cutting the shrub in which we were lying. I ordered each machine-gun on that hill stalked and grenaded. It was the only way to clear them out. I

had nine bren-guns to cover the stalking parties. I knew it was an awful order to give the men, because it meant they had to crawl right up on their bellies to the machine-gun pits and toss their grenades into them while they were under fire.

"The right platoon went into its attack under direct fire from four machine-guns only about forty yards away. One of the three section commanders was killed and the other two were wounded. The three bren-guns were knocked out and the whole section was pinned down by those machine-guns.

"Just then one of the most amazing things happened. The noise on the hill was terrific. Machine-guns were rattling all over the place. The Germans were shouting and yelling at each other. My men were firing their bren-guns and tossing grenades in the darkness. The flashes of the grenades kept lighting up the whole hill, but never for long enough for us to study the ground. In the middle of all this terrible noise a voice started to sing. It was a beautiful tenor voice. It was a Welsh corporal who had been wounded. He was singing the company song. His voice really was beautiful and you seemed to hear every word he was singing even over the shouts and the shooting. Gradually, the voice began to falter. We all realized that Corporal Jones was dying and there was nothing any of us could do for him. But he went right on singing, lying there among the shrubs and dying. It really was horrible, but it had a tremendous effect on all of us. My men were fighting mad then, and they went on for the next three hours or so, fighting like madmen all the time. But even when they were fighting with such fury they never once lost their coolness or discipline. They fought like V.C.'s—every one of them.

"The platoon moving on the Germans' left flank was led by one of the bravest men I ever knew—a young lieutenant. As soon as he got around the bluff of the hill, a heavy machine-gun opened up on him and the Germans threw several grenades at him. They were very close. He and his sergeant stalked that post. When they got right on top of it, the sergeant shot the machine-gunner and the lieutenant tossed a grenade among the rest of

them. When they were attacking that post, another one opened up on them from about twenty yards away just as the lieutenant was sounding his English hunting horn. That was the signal I had told him to give to tell me he had knocked out the first machine-gun post. I had seen him and his sergeant crawl on their stomachs right under the fire of the machine-guns and I thought surely they couldn't live through that fire. When I heard the shrill note of that hunting horn rise over the rattle of the guns and the screaming of the wounded Germans, it was the most beautiful sound I had ever heard. I suppose that sounds of this battle were as weird as in any battle in the world—with dying men singing and hunting horns tooting.

"Then they crawled along to attack the second post. I saw the lieutenant's silhouette rise in the darkness to throw another grenade. He looked rather like a statue of a discus-thrower. Suddenly, just as he was poised to throw, he crumpled and fell to the ground. He had been hit across the chest by a machine-gun and was killed instantly. At the same time, a German threw a grenade at the sergeant. He was wounded in the legs and head, but he jerked the pin out of his grenade and threw it at the machine-gun. The pain which he suffered must have been almost unbearable, but it didn't stop him throwing his last grenade. That post never fired on us again. When the sergeant threw that last one, I saw four machine-guns all firing at him on fixed lines. Afterwards, he lay there bleeding until he passed out from loss of blood. He woke up, just before dawn, long after we had been driven off the hill, and found some Germans putting up a mortar just a few yards from him. He was lying in the brush and apparently hadn't been noticed in the half-light. He watched the Germans and every time they were busy loading and firing the mortar, he crawled a few yards away. Gradually, he crawled two miles to the foot of the hill where he got within shouting distance of our forward troops and was saved.

"About that time, I counted fourteen machine-guns firing from the hilltop. Imagine how I felt since I had been told before

that there was only one machine-gun post and a few snipers on the hill. I decided to push onto the ridge with my own platoon. I now had about forty men that I could use. It was 2:30 A. M.

"I ordered a lance-corporal to stalk one of these machine-gun posts. He crawled up to it and found that it really was a concrete pill-box, sunk in the ground with light and heavy machine-guns firing through the slits. But he didn't falter for a second. He crawled on his belly right under the German bullets, which were shooting all around and over him. Finally, when he reached the pill-box, he realized he couldn't knock it out by throwing a grenade at it. He had to get the grenade inside it. He pulled out the pin, stuck his hand through one of the slits and dropped the grenade inside. It was one of the bravest acts I have ever seen—and I think I have seen a good deal of bravery in this war. The corporal actually touched the hand of one of the machine-gunners when he reached through the slit. It must have been a terrifying moment for him. I took a couple of my men and rushed up to the pill-box to see whether I could use it as a headquarters. We pulled six Germans out of it. Three of them were dead, one was dying and the other two were wounded.

"By this time, there were eleven machine-guns firing on us. I couldn't forget that report about only one machine-gun post on the hill. It was getting ridiculous. Every time we silenced a machine-gun post, the Germans started firing their mortars on it. They didn't care what happened to their own men, but they knew, of course, that we were there when the gun stopped firing.

"I sent another sergeant with one man to attack another post. I could hardly see them, but I told the sergeant, who was called Copling, to shout his name as a success signal. The noise had been nerve-shattering all the time. I wondered whether I'd ever hear Copling shout. Suddenly, I heard the crumps of their grenades and the screams of more wounded Germans. Then I heard Copling's name, shouted above the noise. A couple of other posts were taken like that, with the men just crawling up to them and

throwing their grenades into them. By that time, we had knocked out eight posts. It was about three-fifteen.

"I decided to dig in, but just as we started to dig, another machine-gun started firing on us from below on the slope of the hill. Then, in the darkness, I saw a long line of about eighty Germans marching up the hill from behind us on our left. Just as I saw them, they started an awful sort of chant. It's difficult to describe. It had no particular rhythm or tune. It was the weirdest sound I ever heard—just a sort of eerie chant. At the same time, they started firing their tommy-guns, or the German equivalent of the tommy-gun. The flashes of the guns were winking in the darkness as if they were so many cats' eyes. You've no idea what a weird sight it was. I saw my men were beginning to break and scatter under this weird attack. They couldn't understand it. I shouted at them to shout right back at the Germans and charge them. We went right at them, shouting and yelling all sorts of curses and firing our Sten guns. It was really sort of comical, with the Germans chanting and my men shouting and swearing at them. The Germans broke completely and ran like stink. They couldn't take what they had started to give out.

"After we had chased those Germans down the hill, I found out we had no ammunition left. At that very moment, I saw a second counter-attack coming. Mortar-bombs started bursting in a terrific concentration about forty yards in front of us. German infantry were following it up, creeping toward the concentration of the bursting bombs. When they got dangerously close to the bursts, they fired a Very light and immediately the mortars lifted their line of fire nearer us. They managed to keep it safely in front of their own infantry all the time. It really was beautiful co-ordination and timing.

"A few minutes before this mortar-ing started, I saw some Germans creeping around my left and right flanks. It was obvious that we couldn't beat off this attack. They were coming at us on both sides and we didn't even have any ammunition. I decided

we had to get out. But first I had to collect my wounded. I ordered a corporal to collect all the wounded he could find in a few minutes. He got seven of them, and I'm sure there weren't any more, at least, there weren't any more who could be saved. By this time, the mortars were bursting right among us and we seemed to be hemmed in. I divided my men into two parties and told them to leap-frog down the hill. We were just in time to escape the pincers move. If we had waited another two or three minutes, I think we all would have been killed or captured."

I asked Major Dobie what his casualties had been in that wild night fighting. It seemed to me that they must have suffered very heavily. "We had five men killed and seven wounded," he said. "I don't know how we got off so lightly, but every one of those men deserves a medal. I've already recommended five of them for decorations. I'm sure we killed at least sixty Germans. God, if we'd only known more about the geography of the hill and about the enemy positions and if we had only had a battalion, instead of my one, under-strength company . . ."

That was the last battle on the First Army front that I was to cover until the final push for Tunis. A couple of days later, I fell ill with grippé. I spent a week in a civilian hospital at Souk-el-Khemis and then developed a mild case of jaundice. Stoneman put me on a plane to Algiers where I spent another week in hospital. He went off toward a new battle around Ouseltia only to land himself in a field hospital with a bullet wound, which forced him to limp when he walked and wince when he sat down.

After I was discharged from hospital in Algiers, I rested for a couple of weeks and watched the war from Allied Force Headquarters. The fighting was beginning to spread to the south, always along the so-called "spine of Tunisia," the range of mountains called the Grand Dorsal. Places with totally foreign names—Djebel Mansour, Faïd Pass, Bou Arada, Robaa, and such—began to appear in reports of the fighting. It all began to take on a new significance—a significance which was important because

of what was happening near the southern border of Tunisia.

The Eighth Army was chasing Rommel's forces through Tripoli and toward the Mareth Line. And the Grand Dorsal suddenly had become the obvious "flank protection" for Rommel. The Americans were moving into the line in Central and Southern Tunisia and were beginning to threaten Rommel's "retreat corridor" to the north. It was clear that he had to join with the forces of Von Arnim, who had relieved Nehring early in December. The Grand Dorsal had to be held to prevent Rommel, with his elite Africa Korps, from being cut off. And that meant that Von Arnim had to hold every important hill and pass—every important vertebra in the spine—so that no one could break through. Von Arnim began hitting out across the hills and the passes to maul the Americans and the French who were around Pont du Fahs and Ousseltia, and every time he struck, his motive became clearer. He wanted to hold what military experts call "the high ground," so that he could always look down on his enemies and make them fight their way up steep, rocky mountains to get at him. His orders—he came under Rommel's supreme command after Tripoli fell—were to keep open the coastal communications to Rommel and to keep the Allies on the western side of the hills. He was doing an excellent job, too, taking advantage of the poorly equipped French troops and the inexperienced Americans. He had the initiative and he was utilizing it masterfully.

About the middle of February, when I was preparing to go back to the First Army front, I was ordered to join the Eighth Army. The prospect interested me greatly, because it meant that I could see the Tunisian fighting from both ends, the north and south. And, besides, the Eighth Army, with its historic push from El Alamein through Tripoli, had become the "greatest army on the Allied side." I flew to Cairo for a week, to get the necessary credentials to work in the Middle East, and then flew back to Tripoli. From there, I drove to the Eighth Army front facing the Mareth Line.



PART X

*HEEL OF ACHILLES*

*By Ned Russell  
John Parris*



## CHAPTER THIRTY-SEVEN

THE British hoisted the Union Jack above the sun-baked, minaretted metropolis of Tripoli at the end of the fourth week in January and Mussolini saw the last vestige of his African Empire crumble before General Montgomery's unbeatable Eighth Army. Field Marshal Erwin Rommel's once crack Afrika Korps, battered and bleeding and gasping for breath, was running north for its very life.

The long string of retreats that had persistently dogged the British since Dunkirk had reached an end and the stage was being set for the last battle which tradition promised they would win. If the Germans could be cleared out of Tunisia—and there was every indication they would be—the springboard to the Continent would be secured.

Up in Tunisia, British and American and French troops slowly closed the trap to secure that springboard.

Twelve hundred miles to the west as the bomber flies two men met in a white villa on the outskirts of Casablanca and shaped the future plans for Democracy's offensive against the last strongholds of the Axis. They had met three times before and the Axis had come to know that a meeting between Roosevelt and Churchill meant trouble. For they were the two men who met in the villa and wrote a new chapter in global war.

Their previous meetings had been held under a cloud of gloom. The United Nations were on the defensive then, trying desperately to stave off what looked like certain disaster, disaster that swirled closer and closer like a tornado plowing across the South. Those conferences had none of the jaunty air of confidence which had marked the festive Brenner meetings of Hitler

and Mussolini in the days when their conquests crowded one upon the other like logs forming a jam.

This time things were different, much different. This time it was Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini who did the wondering and the quaking; this time it was the dictators who saw disaster swirling ahead.

The road had been hard for Roosevelt and Churchill but now they were getting out of the woods. There was still a long rough piece ahead but now they knew where they were going and knew they could make it. The invasion of North Africa had put the Allies on the offensive for the first time and offered a springboard to victory.

They held their first war council fifteen days after Pearl Harbor and placed Germany's mad little corporal first on their list to rub out; they talked about invading Europe. Churchill met Roosevelt again in June but the idea of an invasion across the Channel had pretty well been abandoned, at least for 1942. They reckoned they would have to strike somewhere else where they wouldn't have to use so many men. They decided to send an expeditionary force to North Africa.

So less than three months after the invasion of North Africa the two men left their capitals and came to Casablanca for a ten-day conference. Roosevelt crossed the Atlantic by Clipper and proceeded from a North African point in a four-motored bomber to his rendezvous with Churchill, becoming the first American Chief Executive to fly and the first to visit a war zone since Lincoln dodged the bullets of Confederate sharpshooters outside Washington in July '64.

Churchill flew to the scene, too, coming down from England a few days before Roosevelt arrived.

The fact that something big was impending was pretty well known, and the Allied world was all set for a sensational announcement, but nobody expected to hear that Roosevelt was in Africa, of all places.

The two men met and talked and planned the prosecution of

a global war with top-ranking American and British military, naval and air strategists. There in Casablanca they signed the doom of Hitler, Mussolini and Hirohito.

Roosevelt and Churchill surveyed the entire field of the war, theater by theater, and reached complete agreement "upon the war plans and enterprises to be taken during the campaign of 1943 against Germany, Italy and Japan."

Because the combined chiefs of staff of the United States and England also conferred for ten days there was every reason to assume that the "plans and enterprises" were drawn up in specific form. They decided at just what points Hitler's European fortress would be attacked and which attacks would be real and which would be feints.

President Roosevelt christened it the "Unconditional Surrender Conference," borrowing a phrase from General Ulysses S. Grant, who, on February 16, 1862, after he had trapped a strong Confederate force at Fort Donelson, Tennessee, wrote Brig.-Gen. S. B. Buckner, "No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted. I propose to move immediately upon your works."

For the first time Britain and America wrote on the record that there would be no dickering about armistice terms this time. Nor would they listen to any peace offensive which Hitler might launch. This time the die was cast for "total surrender." This time there would be no outs for the men who had tried to wipe freedom from the world. There was only one way out for the Axis—unconditional surrender. The combined Allied staffs would see to that. They were pledged to move immediately upon the Axis works.

The two great leaders of democracy pledged that peace would return to the world, but emphasized that it could only come by the total destruction of the power of Germany and Japan to make war.

Nothing was said of Italy's power to make war.

President Roosevelt emphasized that there was no intention

on the part of the United Nations to harm the people of the Axis countries or of the Axis-dominated countries, but he said that the United Nations would certainly destroy the philosophy of hate and fear leading to the subjugation of other peoples.

He told newspaper correspondents representing the free press of the world that the war against the Axis would be pressed to a successful conclusion. He observed that 1942 had been a good year and added that there was every indication that 1943 would be an even better year.

For fifteen American and British newspapermen January 24, 1943 will be a day never to be forgotten, a day the historians would say changed the world.

It was hot for January that historic Sabbath morning there in the garden of the luxurious white villa by the sea on the outskirts of Casablanca. Mild breezes from the South Atlantic fluttered the purple bougainvillea that blazed over the house. Palm trees shaded the villa, and there were ripening oranges in the yard. It was a setting that might have been conceived in Hollywood. The war seemed so far away, but it was only eight hundred and fifty miles from the nearest German air base—an easy hop for Goering's bombers. Less than a thousand miles to the east American and British soldiers were locked in deadly combat with the Germans and Italians.

But there in the garden it was so peaceful, so beautiful. The war had passed this spot by but outside there was evidence of the conflict, evidence of the importance of this meeting, a clue to the importance of the characters. The entire area for blocks around was full of troops, anti-aircraft equipment and barbed wire. G-Men and White House Secret Service agents swarmed about the villa and khaki sentries with bayoneted rifles patrolled outside.

The magnificent tiled swimming pool in the garden had been turned into an air raid shelter. Two white leather-backed chairs were just at the edge of the terrace.

One moment the garden was empty. Then Colonel Elliott Roosevelt appeared at the back door of the villa carrying two more chairs.

The President walked out onto the terrace. He was dressed in a gray business suit and black tie. As usual, he was smoking a cigarette in a long holder. And he was smiling.

A minute later, Prime Minister Churchill stepped from the villa into the garden. He was wearing a gray pin-stripe suit and black shoes with zippers. He wore a gray hat and had a big black cigar in his mouth.

Then General Henri Honoré Giraud, administrator of North Africa, tall and immaculate, and General Charles DeGaulle, leader of the Fighting French, joined the conference. Giraud sat at the end seat on the President's right. On the President's left was DeGaulle and to the latter's left sat Churchill.

The fifteen correspondents made their entrance. The President recognized some of them who had covered his press conferences back in Washington and greeted them personally. The cameramen moved up their cameras and began taking pictures.

Roosevelt turned to the Prime Minister and asked him if he wished to take off his hat.

"I wear a hat to keep the sun from my eyes," Churchill said. "You know, you should wear one."

The President smiled. "I was born without a hat," he said. "I don't see any reason for wearing one now."

They both laughed.

This was probably the most informal press conference ever held. And probably the most important meeting of leaders of two great nations in history. Roosevelt suggested that the correspondents move closer and said it was all right for them to sit on the ground. The boys gathered closer, sprawling on the grass at the feet of Roosevelt and Churchill.

The President did most of the talking, but Churchill interjected to say that the discussions of the past ten days had been

the most successful war talks of his career. The results of the conference, he said, would give the Allied armies their best chance of victory.

In Berlin, the "Little Corporal" stormed at Himmler and wanted to know why the Gestapo couldn't find out where Roosevelt and Churchill were meeting. Was the Gestapo slipping? Was Himmler paying attention to business? These were things Hitler asked his ruthless police chief. Der Fuehrer was in no mood for the answers Himmler gave him. In a few hours the world would know what Hitler wanted to know then. He would have to wait along with John Smith and Billy Brown.

If Adolf Hitler could have heard what Roosevelt was telling the fifteen correspondents he would have realized that his number was up. For there was something deeply prophetic in the President's words, a warning and a promise—a warning to Hitler and a promise to the silent little peoples of the world who prayed for deliverance from the Axis monsters.

The President said that the United Nations had made plans to dig down to the bottom of their resources—if necessary—in order to carry out the extermination of Axis war power as quickly as possible. America, Britain and Russia were determined to end the reign of Hitler and Mussolini and Hirohito.

By a strange coincidence, Churchill and Roosevelt laid the plans for Hitler's extermination just a week before the tenth anniversary of Der Fuehrer's rise to power in Germany. Just ten years after Hitler received the post of chancellor from a man who probably despised him—tired, old President von Hindenburg. Where there had been great celebrations before honoring the "Little Corporal" there would be silence, and a rising fear in the hearts of Germans at home and on the battlefields of Russia and Africa, in the hearts of Nazi fliers and sailors and U-boat crewmen. Whether Hitler would live another year or be in power to celebrate his position seemed problematical. Especially in view of the decisions made by Roosevelt and Churchill.

A shadow was falling across Hitler and his philosophy. Roose-

velt and Churchill, speaking to correspondents, left no doubt that the United Nations would relax in any way in holding and pushing the initiative until the enemy had been overwhelmed. There was every indication that the Allied war effort would be progressively integrated.

North Africa had to be freed and that would be done just as speedily as possible. The move was already under way. It didn't seem likely that any new fronts would be opened until the enemy had been cleared from Tunisia.

The pattern was forming. It started with the invasion of North Africa. It took further shape as the Eighth Army rocked Mussolini back on his heels. The fall of North Africa was only a matter of time, time that was fast running out like sand in an hour glass. Then to greater things.

Roosevelt and Churchill were confident of the future as they sat there in the garden talking.

They explained that originally they had not intended to meet in Casablanca. They had hoped to meet farther east, possibly Cairo, for a United Nations conference, not an Anglo-American one. Premier Joseph Stalin had been invited but was unable to leave Russia at the time because of the great offensive which he himself as commander in chief was directing. If Stalin could have found time to leave Russia the conference would have been held elsewhere. Stalin, however, was kept informed minutely of what went on, and so was Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek.

In another respect the Casablanca conference must have held disappointment for Roosevelt and Churchill. They had hoped to bring about unity between Giraud and DeGaulle and clear up a smelly political mess in North Africa.

Giraud and DeGaulle met and talked there at Casablanca but they were still as far apart as the two poles. For the time being, at least, there seemed to be two French empires. General Giraud said he saw no immediate prospect of a single, united French movement.

During the ten-day conference the President went on a tour

of the area. One day American troops, who had landed at Casablanca, lined up for what they thought was just another dreary review. Down the line came a jeep and in it, to their utter astonishment, was the President, their Commander in Chief. Standing rigidly at attention and unable to look in the direction from which the President was coming, each was surprised in turn as Roosevelt's jeep drew opposite him:

Their eyes literally popped when they saw the President pass only six feet away with a big smile on his face. Few soldiers were able to wipe off their own smiles of pleasure when the presidential car had passed.

The President spoke to some of the men. He lunched with them in the field and said it was a darn good lunch.

After he reviewed the troops he went to Port Lyautey, where heavy fighting had occurred when the Americans had landed in November. He saw the graves at the joint French and American military cemetery and placed wreaths on the American and French graves. He said the French were brave fighters.

"I saw the equipment of our soldiers," he explained to the war correspondents. "They are ready for action at any time. They wish the people back home could see them, for they have the finest weapons any nation can give them. They are eager to fight again, and I think they will like to have me say a word for the fineness and bravery of the French we fought."

When the press conference ended President Roosevelt left the garden and went to his villa while Churchill chatted with Ward Price of the London *Daily Mail*. When the British Prime Minister left, he was chewing a no-longer lighted cigar and pointing to his V-for-Victory lapel button.

While the correspondents were in Casablanca they were kept herded together with G-Men watching their movements.

Walter Logan of the United Press, who had been on a trip to Dakar, wandered into Casablanca a couple days after Roosevelt and Churchill arrived. The other correspondents selected to cover the press conference were still in Algiers and were only to

be flown down at the conclusion of the war council. When Logan arrived he sensed that something momentous was stirring and began asking questions. He didn't pass on any of the rumors he heard, but his probings aroused the ire of G-2, which is U. S. Army Intelligence and they called him in.

"If you go near a certain villa," a G-2 officer told Logan, "you will be shot."

After that Logan tried not to notice the many Army and Navy photographers, the influx of R.A.F. pilots and American pilots with recent news from the United States, civilians and consuls with Finnish and other baggage labels.

One of the most popular rumors was that the airport defenses had been instructed not to fire on any planes at certain hours despite the circumstances—which, if true, meant that certain unfriendly planes were expected to land as well as certain neutrals.

So well kept was the secret of the meeting of Churchill and Roosevelt that Hitler didn't know about it until it was announced by American and British radios.

There were reports from Switzerland that Himmler had recalled Gestapo agents from Tangier and Madrid because they had failed to discover the meeting.

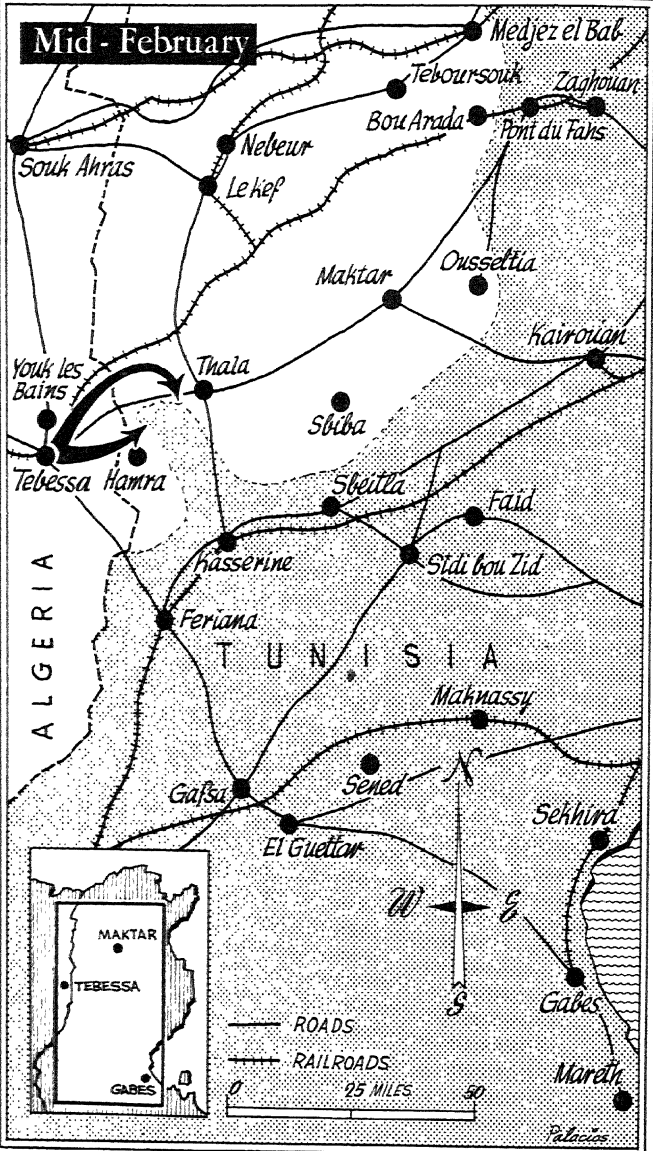


PART X

*HEEL OF ACHILLES*

*By Ned Russell*  
*John Parris*

**Mid - February**



## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

TWO months in southern Tunisia, from mid-February until mid-April, changed the American army in North Africa from a "test tube baby" into a tried, competent body of fighting men. The doughboys didn't reach their peak until the final attack at Bizerte. But during those days on the semi-arid plains and raw brown mountains in the south, they turned the corner.

From there the road leads to Europe.

They had confidence, determination and most precious of all, experience. They had learned how.

That is what lies behind the splendid American performance that drove the Germans from Mateur, and finally Bizerte.

The real turning point came in the great natural amphitheater of the Kasserine plain, there in late February. On this sixteen-mile valley floor between Kasserine Pass and Djebel Hamra Pass to the northwest, surrounded by a circle of jagged mountains, the Americans rallied from a bad defeat and halted a critical enemy drive.

Never after that did the Germans win another inch of ground from them.

After months of sparring in southern Tunisia, Rommel sent the weight of his freshly equipped Twenty-first Panzer Division streaming from Faid Pass on Sunday morning, February 14.

The British Eighth Army was nearing the Mareth Line, further south. Rommel thought it essential to widen his coastal corridor.

The Americans were spread too thin, with too little. They had taken over the area from the French only a short time before. As events proved, what strength they had was not too well placed, nor too well used. Whose fault that was it is difficult to determine. Not one man's, certainly.

Defeated in detail by large forces which overwhelmed their scattered, smaller detachments, the Americans reeled back on their heels. In quick succession they lost Sidi-bou-Zid, Sbeitla and Kasserine Village.

Further southwest, they were forced to abandon Gafsa and Feriana, forty-five miles up the Constantine road, because the garrisons faced isolation.

About a hundred American tanks were lost, hundreds of American men captured and hundreds killed. The airfields at Thelepte were abandoned.

The Americans fell back to a mountainous line north of Kasserine and Feriana, defending their key supply point at Tebessa. Quickly the German infantry and tanks penetrated the American minefields and artillery at Kasserine Pass, some four miles north of the village, and poured into the great two-pronged amphitheater.

They were headed for Tebessa and ultimately for a great encirclement operation by which Rommel hoped to get behind the British First Army facing Tunis. That would change the whole North African battle picture.

He thought he had the Americans in rout.

Then came Kasserine.

Washington's Birthday broke raw and rainy over the Kasserine valley floor.

Masses of sodden cloud clung to the rocky sawtooth hills that made the huge U-shaped valley a vast amphitheater. The aerial ceiling lifted barely two hundred feet above the bunchgrass and clay.

Drab, dripping mist spread a blinding filter over the battlefield where the American army, aided by the British, was fighting grimly to halt a defeat that had assumed critical proportions.

Groups of American tank men in greasy green coveralls rolled up their blankets from under the treads of their General Grant and Sherman tanks deployed in "hull down" positions in the *wadis*—dry stream beds—that crisscrossed the plain.

They wondered what the day would produce. They knew the German guns, tanks and infantry had advanced some eleven miles across the plain the previous day despite stiffening American resistance.

Private Pressley Hornsby, who used to dig coal at Harlan, Kentucky, drawled wistfully as he climbed into his Grant, "Wish I had me only a nice mining feud to worry about. They sure play rougher here."

They knew the day probably would answer whether they could keep their toe-hold on the plain, whether Combat Command B could hold Djebel Hamra Pass, or whether the Germans would open the gateway to Tebessa, twenty-two miles away.

They knew also they might get killed.

In the ridges protecting the pass, artillerymen arranged the piles of ammunition that had been brought forward during the night. Over on the west side of the valley, and around the fringes, infantrymen looked to their rifles.

North of Kasserine Pass the valley formed a rough U-shape, with the pass itself as the base. The left prong ran up northwest to Hamra, the right prong north to Thala. Single mud tracks ran through each prong. A forbidding hill *massif* separated the prongs and prevented men in one from seeing what men in the other were doing.

The roads joined at the pass itself.

Boxlike white adobe Arab huts speckled the plain. Beds of neatly planted cactus provided food for the camels and slight cover for the soldiers. All around in the mist rose the mountains.

Early on the twenty-second it became apparent that Rommel had found American resistance in the Hamra prong very tough the previous afternoon and had decided to commit the bulk of his armor in a thrust up the Thala prong. A column of some seventy tanks churned toward Thala, gleaming in the slight cold rain. They hoped to break through the British armor and American artillery that had been gathered hastily at the head of the prong and circle around behind the Hamra position to Tebessa.

They ran into the thump-thump-thump of heavy artillery and made little progress. Once they were less than two miles from Thala. They never got there.

Toward Hamra, Rommel threw the rest of his striking forces, including Italian infantry. He was fully committed.

They found dozens of American 75-, 105- and 155-millimeter guns waiting for them on the plain before the pass. Hundreds of shells rained down on the attackers.

Over on the west edge of the valley, Italian and American infantry clashed in the *wadis* with machine guns, rifles and grenades. Their private little war was invisible through the mist to observers in the hills.

The Grants and Shermans hidden in the *wadis* used their 75-millimeter guns as fixed artillery, adding to the flashing curtain of fire.

Mobile tank destroyers, guns mounted on tank and half-track chassis, darted about the field in the gloom. One would stop, fire two or three quick shells, then dash two or three hundred yards away. A few seconds later came the pumph-pumph-pumph of the deadly German 88-millimeter guns in reply, right on the spot where the American gun had been.

Withal, there was a minimum of personal contact. It was an armor and artillery fight. Before the day was out, it was an air fight, too.

Crews of the tanks went twelve hours without crawling outside the steel hulls. One tank man suggested plaintively that designers of future tanks had better install toilet facilities.

Typical of the tank fight that day was the Grant tank commanded by Sergeant William Williams, a twenty-five-year-old native of Nashville, Tennessee. From 9 A. M. until after dark the five men lived and fought in the confines of their steel castle.

Williams as commander stood with his head sticking out the turret, directing fire. He was bundled up against the cold in a wool knit cap and scarf beneath his steel helmet. Grime smeared his unshaven face.

The Grant was firing at anything it saw moving, working at about a 1500-yard range. German shells burst all around it, pitting neat holes in the light brown earth and chewing the road into a wretched, upheaved path.

What they did to the American position was nothing compared to the havoc wrought by the American barrage, as the doughboys were to see later.

"Those 88 shells were whizzing past so low that I ducked and stuck my head up again like I was doing setting up exercises," Williams said. "Shells were banging all around. Fragments hitting the tank sounded like rain on a tin roof. But the Jerries didn't hit my tank."

All the tank crew ate that day was canned meat and vegetable hash, mixed with canned meat and beans, that they took from a case of C-rations each tank carried. There wasn't much time for eating, anyway.

At night kitchen trucks carrying hot food dashed onto the battlefield, dodging shells as they dashed from tank to tank. The KP crews ladled a mass of hot food into each man's messkit.

"That was one time the mess gang really showed speed," Williams said.

Men watching the battle from hilltop observation posts could see little of the fighting in the gloom. They heard echoing salvos of shells, and they saw spurts of flame as a vehicle was hit.

They were intensely surprised during the morning when they saw a few pairs of American Boston light bombers scudding beneath the low ceiling right above the enemy positions.

Low-altitude bombing that morning was almost a suicide mission, but the situation was critical. The fight was at its crisis, and every ounce of hitting power was needed. Crews of the swift light bombers back on their field at Youks-les-Bains, just north of Tebessa, were told the situation and the risks they faced. They went.

The planes came in pairs, wing to wing, screaming along the ground at three hundred miles an hour as their bellies almost

touched the grass. Fires blossomed in their wake. At one time during the day twenty-five columns of smoke and fire were leaping into the low gray sky from burning pyres of equipment. Part was the work of bombers, part of artillery.

Noon came and went, and there was little change.

In mid-afternoon the sky broke. Patches of blue appeared. With them came the American air force in its most sensational display of striking power to date. It was a display that was to be greatly outdone later in the closing phases of the campaign, but at that time it was the finest air show in Tunisia.

Swarms of bombers and fighters that literally filled the sky swept through the mountain passes and over the plain. They struck with bombs, machine guns and cannon at the Axis troops and vehicles.

Particularly they concentrated their wrath in the Kasserine Pass itself—the bottleneck through which all Axis forces must pass if they were forced to withdraw.

Days later when the Allies once more held the pass, we were able to see what damage those planes had wrought. White gashes on the brownish rock showed where bombs had exploded. Traffic had to snake around great craters in the road.

Burned-out Axis tanks, guns and vehicles lay like charred dead on the slopes.

By 5 P. M. the crisis was past. Allied gunpower had proved superior.

Before the American position at Hamra the enemy began to withdraw, still firing heavily in retort to the endless American barrage. In the other prong, Thala still was in Allied hands.

As the Hamra column drew back, the Thala column became increasingly exposed on its left flank. The backbone of the attack was broken.

Fighting continued on the plain before Hamra until about 9 P. M. The moon was rising, and through its shadowy light came more Allied bombers to press home the attack against the falter-

ing enemy. For three hours they dropped bombs in relays on the pass, the road and gun positions.

Mud-soaked pilots in steel helmets and galoshes slopped around the edge of the Youks-les-Bains airdrome late that afternoon. They were staring up at the scores of American fighters and bombers droning toward Kasserine, aware for the first time of their own might.

They had just flown two missions against enemy tanks below Thala.

Four lieutenants rose from bales of hay and stacks of empty gasoline cans, headed for the operations dugout. They were taking their Boston bombers up for yet another crack.

I stood on the field talking with men barely twenty who had been running the gauntlet of German flak and machine-gun fire in the valley thirty minutes before.

Captain Leo Fielder of Hamlin, Texas, wearing a fur-lined flying jacket with winter cap jauntily on one ear above his round pink face, was telling me how he had attacked the German tank concentration south of Thala from an altitude of thirty feet that morning.

"We came in from the north over the crest of a ridge," he said. "The Allied tanks were north of the ridge and German tanks south of it. It was like a bunch of kids throwing rocks across a hilltop at each other.

"When we scooted over the crest we opened up with machine guns. You should have seen those Jerries dive for slit trenches.

"Then we dropped a load of delayed action bombs right in the middle of a lot of tanks and half-tracks.

"The Germans threw a lot of machine-gun bullets at us, but the first planes were such a surprise we didn't have much trouble."

Half-pint Lieutenant James D. Gilmore of Tulsa, Oklahoma, another Boston pilot with bushy sideburns and a toothy grin, had

just returned from a solo trip over the enemy armored column at fifty feet.

He made the same run during the morning in formation. Then he spotted such choice targets that he went off by himself in the afternoon.

"I dropped ten bombs at almost three hundred miles an hour, then turned loose the machine guns," he said. "I mowed down one motorcyclist on the road. I was so busy trying to hit everything in sight that I didn't think about it at the time, but I feel bad about seeing that motorcyclist crumble up.

"Probably I'll brood about it tonight. I like this business lots better when I can't actually see the men we are attacking."

Through the excited conversation ran a strain of worry. One of the Bostons hadn't come back from the last mission.

Three days later when the Americans reoccupied Kasserine Pass we found out why.

Lying beside the bullet-riddled bomber just outside the pass were the crushed bodies of three young American aviators. They had been pulled from the wreckage and stripped of their clothing by the Arabs.

Nobody had thought about burying them.

The following day was one of odd inactivity. The Germans were running for home without offering to fight. They simply broke off contact—a trick which didn't reflect particular credit on the American reconnaissance forces—and withdrew.

Rommel, directing the fight from a farmhouse near Kasserine, realized his neck was out too far and he had to pull it back before it was lopped off.

He saw that the Americans had stiffened immeasurably with their backs to the wall. The Germans were getting nowhere. And every man in both the Hamra and Thala prongs was dependent for supplies upon the mud track twisting through the Kasserine Pass.

Once German offensive momentum was stopped, the Axis posi-

tion was dangerous in the extreme. A quick American advance on the Hamra side, and the entire armored column up the Thala prong might be trapped from the rear.

So the Germans laid mines and pulled back into the pass.

Throughout the day I watched the splattered American jeeps and half-tracks feel their way forward southeastward toward Kasserine Pass across the valley dappled with sunlight.

Late in the afternoon an officer crouching in a forward observation post reported back by short-wave radio that no enemy forces remained on the plain, and the Americans could advance within a mile or so of the pass.

On the Thala side, the British moved slowly forward through mine fields, but less rapidly than the Americans.

In a jeep I went forward with the advance. The soft ground was churned by the treads of tanks where yesterday the battle was fought. Piles of empty shell cases marked the sites of gun positions abandoned during the night by the enemy.

Scattered on the field were German and Italian motorcycles, trucks, anti-tank guns, canteens, German pulp magazines, carbines and a pair of boxing gloves.

Italian prisoners wearing sun helmets with black feather plumes dug graves under the watchful eyes of American soldiers in green coveralls. Bleary eyed, unshaven tank crews stood around their machines, guarding the dirt road. Near them were hulks of burned Italian light tanks and a few German Mark Fours.

Overhead through scattered clouds sped formations of American bombers, escorted by squadrons of Spitfires zooming like gnats and dipping their elliptical wings to identify themselves.

After each formation passed, we saw columns of black smoke spiral up from the pass. The Spitfires stooped over the pass, protecting the bombers and spotting new targets.

A corporal leaned against his tank, lighting a cigarette, and grinned: "Maybe our air corps ain't so bad at that."

Threading forward on our flanks, lines of jeeps and half-tracks

carrying artillery rolled carefully. Except for the drone of planes and the clanking traffic, it was a silent advance until shortly before dusk, when the newly advanced artillery opened up on enemy positions near the slit-like pass in the long ridge line.

All night long columns of German transport rolled southwest through Kasserine Village toward Feriana, leaving in their wake burning piles of captured equipment.

The lull continued throughout the morning of the twenty-fourth. American forces owned the plain, more or less by default, and the enemy was getting away. There was no ground contact. American fighters strafed the roads behind the enemy lines, but otherwise the Germans withdrew at will.

That afternoon I drove a jeep far out across the plain along the ruins of the road, past the battlefield debris and close to the pass itself.

Less than a mile ahead of us the outpost line of Grant and Sherman tanks was spread thinly across the valley facing the pass.

As we came to a cluster of Arab huts, German guns firing out from the pass began pasting the tanks. There were clouds of heavy black smoke and orange flashes as bursting shells straddled the rutted dirt road before us. Motors coughed, and the tanks did a snake dance back out of range as the shellbursts followed them.

American heavy guns in the hills to our right returned the fire, feeling out the German gun posts. Beside us in the ditch flopped a wrecked Italian ammunition truck, still loaded with shells, grenades, American gasoline tins and an American razor.

Beside it were three fresh Italian graves neatly surrounded by rocks. There were small makeshift wooden crosses bearing names scrawled in purple ink.

On one grave was a green field cap. No souvenir hunter had touched it.

An Arab family leading its camels and donkeys moved se-

ately across the fields, barely outside artillery range. They were returning to their mud huts which two days before had been German strong points.

Enemy artillery firing down from the pass raised its range, and shells began falling a bit too close for us to maintain an impersonal attitude.

We turned the jeep back across the plain. There was a sudden sickening drag, and I pulled the car off the track. We had a flat tire.

With one eye on the artillery behind us, Fred Painton of *Reader's Digest*, an old war horse, climbed out to look. Our right rear tire had a C-ration can key jabbed in it like a dagger.

"Hey, Phil, we don't have any spare tire!" he boomed out in amazement above the crackling shellbursts.

We had borrowed the jeep that morning and never looked at its equipment. Just assumed we had a spare.

It was growing dark, the shells were actively present behind us and we were stranded on the plain twelve miles from nowhere.

With Graham Hovey of International News Service, third member of our party, we stared in bewilderment at the offending tire. It was very flat.

"We don't have any repair kit, either," Fred reported.

Nobody had any bright ideas at all, except the lustreless one of driving on the flat, limping like a three legged horse. We had almost reached the point of trying it.

Then along came a jeep driven by Lieutenant Joseph Fink of New York City, and suddenly our troubles were solved.

"I'll trade you my good spare for your flat tire," he said.

Our war effort looked much brighter, and we drove home to Tebessa. As we drove in the darkness, great jagged flashes streaked the sky where the artillery duel continued.

We knew that at first light the next morning, the Americans were going to attack the pass itself. Already infantry was infiltrating over the shoulders.

During mid-evening the German artillery ceased firing from the pass, but the American 155's kept hurling shells for hours.

At 6:30 A. M. the infantry charged over the western shoulder of the hills down toward the pass.

Nothing happened. The enemy had fled.

Suddenly the pass was ours, for nothing.

Medium tanks and tank destroyers moved forward to the edge of the pass. There they found a heavy minefield.

At the same time British infantry moved gingerly down the Thala prong without opposition except hundreds and hundreds of mines.

I stood on a rocky knob in the northern end of the pass in mid-morning with the most advanced platoon of tanks. Below us combat engineers were lifting mines that had been laid in a criss-cross pattern along the road and shoulders at ten-foot intervals.

Tanks behind us on the pock-marked plain raised clouds of dust as they maneuvered into position, waiting to go through the pass when a path was cleared.

We counted a score of ruined trucks, at least eight burned out enemy tanks and several charred guns near by. Beyond the wasted remnant of the road, fairly close together, were a crashed Stuka and the Boston bomber.

Everywhere there was a letdown feeling among the troops. They had expected a fight to obtain this, their first tangible victory against the Germans.

"Gosh, I'm sort of disappointed we didn't get a chance to drill a few of those guys," a ragged doughboy said. "All we find is more of these damned mines."

Fifty yards behind the advanced outpost, soldiers sat in a jeep reading a Superman comic strip.

Exhausted tank crews, sprawling in the sunshine, took off their shoes for the first time in days and lazily wriggled their toes.

Their job was finished for the moment.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-NINE

AFTER Kasserine, Major General Lloyd Fredendall was relieved as commander of the American Second Corps. He was replaced by Major General George S. Patton, Jr., who quickly got a third star for coming over from Morocco and became a lieutenant general.

There is so much color about Georgie Patton that it almost oozes. Yet in conversation tough old "Blood and Guts" can be so soft spoken and kindly that he appears almost fatherly in a profane way.

Hard-crusted generals who go around damning Adolf Hitler and cursing lazy soldiers aren't supposed to cry. But when Patton learned that his virile young aide, Captain Richard Jensen, had died during a bombing attack in the El Guettar valley, his eyes filled with tears.

After Patton took over the Second Corps and moved its headquarters to Feriana, his command car became a common sight wherever there was fighting. His ramrod figure in steel helmet, brown leather jacket, GI khaki pants and tank boots has the same vigor at fifty-seven that it had twenty-five years ago when he was dashing around the battlefields of France as Pershing's aide. At his side he totes a pearl-handled frontier-model six shooter.

I saw him stand motionless outside Sened station while four Messerschmitts zipped down the valley at two hundred feet above us, and soldiers dived for foxholes. He practices what he preaches about officers being leaders.

Patton is known throughout the army as a tank warrior, and it is for that reason he was named to lead the Americans in the south Tunisian operations. Later, when they had finished cam-

paigning in the south and were to move into the north Tunisian hills where armor could be of little use, he was sent to another command.

He in turn was succeeded by an infantry expert, Major General Omar Bradley of Moberly, Missouri, who led the Americans to their triumph at Bizerte.

As a pledge of his determination to make a success of his command, Patton quit smoking and drinking until Tunis was captured.

"When I enter Tunis, I hope somebody will hand me a cigar and a bottle of whiskey," he said. Unfortunately he never entered Tunis.

He is affectionately known among his men as "The Green Hornet" or "Flash Gordon" because of his fondness for colorful clothes and his flamboyant manner. But there is much more to him than that; the better you know him, the more you realize that the Flash Gordon act is really a front.

Probably George Patton's shiny bald spot fringed with snow-white hair will have more and more prominent position in Allied war councils as the fight continues. General Eisenhower himself praised Patton as one of America's greatest soldiers.

Over an after-dinner cigar his voice is soft and soothing. But when he catches an officer failing to satisfy the general's strict ideas of discipline, that voice turns rasping and cruel. It heaps such abuse upon the offender that he rarely sins again.

A career soldier himself, Patton is a strong believer in giving a break to the buck privates pulled from civilian life, given rifles and parked in muddy slit trenches.

"The private out there getting shot at does most of the work in this war and gets damned little out of it," he said. "A man can be ferocious as hell back home on three hot meals a day, but it takes guts to live in a foxhole in the rain, eating cold canned rations."

Crackling efficiency and neatness are the keynotes around his headquarters, reflecting the general himself. His first order when

taking over Second Corps was that soldiers should wear leggings and steel helmets at all times.

Those who neglected to obey were hit directly in the pocket-book, where it hurts.

Patton prides himself in the concise way his orders are written. If the order for a major action can be condensed into a single page, then he considers it good. He is no swivel-chair general; he wants to be near the action.

"A military leader must get out in front even if he gets killed," the general tells his officers. "Go forward. Always go forward. You must not fail to do this. Go until the last shot is fired and the last drop of gasoline is gone. Then go forward on foot."

While visiting wounded in a field hospital near Feriana, he asked a soldier how he had been wounded. The soldier replied he had been shot while surrendering.

Patton turned bitterly to a companion. "Serves him right. That's what he gets for giving up."

Patton himself was wounded in the Meuse-Argonne offensive in the fall of 1918. He won the Distinguished Service Cross for leading his tank brigade and rallying another force of disorganized infantry.

Stories of the general's quick tongue and graphic speech are abundant, for he believes in vivid object lessons.

During a staff meeting while planning the Moroccan landings by his western task force in November, he said characteristically:

"If one word of our plans reaches the enemy, ————— we will be dead men—and most of us will be in hell."

Some of his armored officers still chuckle at the way he drove home a warning against rushing anti-tank guns head on with tanks.

"It reminds me of the man who went up to a New York policeman and asked the quickest way to reach Bellevue Hospital," he told them. "The cop said, 'Stick your head into Kelly's saloon and yell 'to hell with the Pope.'"

"The quickest way to hell, gentlemen, is to go roaring right at the muzzle of an anti-tank gun. Always outflank it."

When Patton took over the Second Corps, he took command of three American infantry divisions—the First, Ninth and Thirty-fourth—the First Armored Division, a corps artillery brigade and other unattached units under corps control. It was the largest American combat force to face the Germans since 1918.

For the first time, the Americans were fighting as a completely independent organization. General Fredendall, during his command of the corps, had been responsible to General Anderson, commander of the British First Army. This arrangement was not satisfactory. Under the new deal, Patton was told he was responsible only to General Alexander, commander of the Eighteenth Army Group.

After months of ups and downs, the Americans were loaded for bear and hunting a fight.

## CHAPTER FORTY

THE real squeeze against the Axis in southern Tunisia began on the morning of Wednesday, March 17.

In the south, the Eighth Army was at the Mareth Line. Some hundred miles to the northwest, the Americans faced Gafsa.

That morning they recaptured Gafsa. They took it with such power that the Italians and Germans didn't even stay to fight.

Gafsa was another of those bloodless victories that perplexed the belligerent Americans for days. The doughboys were out for revenge, but the enemy got on his bicycle and fled whenever they came after him.

It was the third capture of Gafsa since November, a fact commemorated by a ribald parody called *The Third Time We Took Gafsa*. The first two times only small forces were involved, and eventually they withdrew in the face of superior force because

at that time the dusty little oasis village near the edge of the desert didn't mean much.

This time Gafsa meant a great deal. Allied plans were to make it a major supply base for the Eighth Army, from which the British could draw ammunition, gasoline and food as soon as they cracked the Mareth Line and opened the Gabes-Gafsa highway.

On that bright March morning, the Americans threw the entire weight of the First Infantry Division at Gafsa. They were supported by French forces approaching from the southwest, and had the first armored division in close reserve.

At 7:30 A.M. the Americans opened an artillery barrage, pounding the perimeter defenses and lobbing shells onto the lines of defeat beyond the palm-treed oasis.

At 9:45 a formation of Billy Mitchell bombers rained explosives on the same targets.

At 10:00 the infantry attacked from three directions after moving into position by truck overnight.

The defenders shot off a few machine guns and rifles, blew a few holes in the road and ran. They left substantial minefields around the edge of town.

By noon American patrols entered the town, closely followed by a regiment of war correspondents. Herds of sheep had been gathered to be driven across mined areas in town, but they weren't needed.

The German air force stayed home that day. It was all just like the Louisiana maneuvers.

Less than a week later I was in Maknassy. This dusty hamlet that had been getting world publicity for days is nothing but a whistle stop on the narrow-gauge railroad to the coast.

It certainly doesn't look much like a military objective. There are about fifty one-story cream-colored plaster houses with red roofs, about as many eucalyptus trees, a railroad station and a muddy village square.

The German air force seems to like it, though. Stukas have been dive bombing around it all day, ever since the Americans captured it at dawn.

Less than forty miles to the east lies the Tunisian coast road between Gabes and Sfax, up which the Germans now at the Mareth Line must eventually retreat. This American armored column that has advanced swiftly along the Maknassy valley from Gafsa during the past two days certainly has become a dagger in the German side.

The Germans and Italians abandoned Maknassy at 5 A. M., virtually without opposition, just as they have abandoned the entire fifty miles of flowery valley from Gafsa eastward. They left thousands of mines on the wretched mud road and in the fields, and they shot off some artillery from the hills. That's all.

We came up this valley expecting a scrap. Once, at the end of January, the enemy fought bitterly for three days at Sened station, the halfway point. We took it, then withdrew.

This time we intended to take it and hold it. We did, almost at our own convenience.

Apparently the enemy knows when he is overpowered. Say that for him, he picks the places he wants to stand and doesn't fool around where he knows he will be licked quickly. It won't be so easy from here on, though, trying to break through that arc of hills between here and the coast.

This village fell to a patrol of eighteen men armed with tommy guns, grenades and smoke pots. Lieutenant Mervin Sneath, 26, of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, who used to teach school, led the patrol. They worked forward in half-tracks and jeeps to a spot five hundred yards west of the town and reported their position by radio.

Sneath's commanding officer ordered the patrol to proceed on foot through the mines into the village.

"I was really scared," Sneath said, "but we went ahead. We didn't find any opposition because the enemy had pulled out.

We did find plenty of road mines, booby traps and anti-personnel mines."

The American armored force is lumbering forward behind Sneath's patrol through great clouds of dust and spreading itself around the village. The country is dry once again after three days of unseasonable rains. The single dirt track from Gafsa still has patches of mud that look like gobs of watery peanut butter.

German dive bombers have come through loose clouds from the east time and again to attack the American armor.

A short time ago, from outside the village, I watched one formation of ten circle, then follow one another in deep dives through the sputtering ack-ack. They dropped their eggs, pulled out and disappeared in pairs over the mountains.

Soldiers in the village fell to the ground and hugged walls. They saw the bombs floating down, heard a great roar and were enveloped in clouds of smoke. The earth shook so hard their teeth chattered.

They didn't leave their posts, though. Gun crews kept firing. They have learned that dive bombing doesn't kill one-tenth as many people as you think it does while you are going through it.

That, of course, is what you tell yourself afterward. Statistics don't mean a thing when those planes are racing straight down at the earth, and every one of them seems aimed straight at you personally.

Off to the north, American artillery is shelling the heights at the Meheri Zebbeus phosphate mine, six miles north of town, where the enemy has artillery posts. German guns are speaking back.

## CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

PROBABLY when the Americans march through the streets of Berlin, the "Fighting First" Infantry Division will be leading

the parade singing its song about fighting "through hell to victory."

It has been the bellwether of the American forces since the Americans landed in Africa. Under spry, tough little Major General Terry Allen it saw more action and successfully executed more difficult assignments than any American division in Tunisia.

There is fairly general agreement—doubtless excepting local pride shouts from other outfits—that the men with the red block letter "one" on their shoulders are the best division in the American army east of the Atlantic. They will admit it until somebody can convince them otherwise.

Mingling with First Division men gives you that spirit of the old college try. They are a team, a gallant team, and they fight as a unit. Terry Allen preached that idea constantly from Oran to Bizerte, and his men believe it. He calls them "the first team."

Many of them died in Tunisia. Their successors have been accepted into the team and made to understand they've got to live up to its reputation. Many more will die, but the division spirit will carry on.

An odd thing, this team spirit among a body of more than 10,000 men. Most divisions have it more or less, but the First has it more. Much like the old British guards regiments.

The First played the major role in the Oran landing operations, and at least part of it was in action almost steadily until Bizerte fell. Part fought at Medjez-el-Bab at Christmas. Others fought in the Ousseltia valley. The division fought as an integrated unit for the first time in Tunisia when it recaptured Gafsa.

At El Guettar it smashed a full-scale German panzer attack and proved that a good infantry force can stop a good armored force.

Fighting side by side with the Ninth Infantry and part of the First Armored Division, it battled its way from ridge to ridge down the long El Guettar valley position until at last the Americans shook hands with men from the Eighth Army.

Then it went to the north and fought another mountain goat battle until Mateur fell, then Bizerte.

Moving spirit of the First across Africa was its chief. Terry Allen is a blunt little scrapper who loves nothing better than to outwit an enemy. He is sharp, dynamic, outspoken and profane. The headline writers naturally call him "Terrible Terry." He hates it.

He'd a hundred times rather talk about the First Division than about himself. But throughout Africa, the First Division's fame was due mostly to Terry Allen.

He is an "army brat," born in Company D of the Fifth Artillery, a famous old outfit which now is part of the First Division. During peace days he was one of the army's best polo players.

His battling little figure in riding breeches and field jacket, with its sparkling dark eyes and gray-black hair, is serious during battle. There is nothing of the playboy about him then.

Three times in the last war Allen was wounded. Once a bullet went through his mouth and ripped through a line of teeth. It cured his stutter.

He is deeply moved by casualties among his men. He knows men must die to win wars, and he is willing to spend men to take objectives, but it hurts.

I saw him in Algiers just after the triumphant close of the Tunisian campaign. He wasn't talking about the great victory at all. He was lamenting the hundreds of dead First Division men he had left in the Tunisian hills, and wondering how he could train their replacements to be as good.

Simplicity is the theme he hammers endlessly. He makes his officers teach fundamentals. In combat his tactics are similar. "Do it the simple, straightforward way and your men will know how," he says.

Assistant to Allen was Brigadier General Teddy Roosevelt, Jr., fighting son of a fighting father. Teddy Jr. rides around the division in a jeep called "Rough Rider" serving as combination assistant commanding general and cheer leader.

The First is the traditional wartime organization of his family, and he is the oldest soldier in it. He went overseas during the last war with the Twenty-sixth Regiment and has been affiliated with the First Division ever since, either on active or reserve status.

Two brothers served in the division with him in the last war. His son Captain Quentin Jr. serves under him in this war.

Teddy Jr. loves the smell of gunpowder. He is happiest when standing in a topless jeep, steel helmet slightly askew, driving from company to company inspecting their positions, or climbing with jaunty step and flourishing walking stick to forward observation posts.

Riding with him on his rounds is like old home week. He shouts personal greetings and encouragement in a bullfrog voice to truckloads of privates and staff cars of officers alike. He knows more men by name than any other person in the division.

Roosevelt was a colonel commanding the Twenty-sixth Infantry at the end of the last war, and he commanded a combat team again during the Oran operation.

Handing out decorations is one of his favorite tasks. He gives a fitting little speech that makes the men feel like real heroes.

"Of course Americans like decorations as much as anybody," I heard him tell one group of Purple Heart recipients. "We like to pin them on and walk up and down in front of our womenfolk so they can see what hell of men they married."

One of the finest fighting jobs the First fashioned in Tunisia came on March 23, when it stopped an attack through the western end of the El Guettar valley by the German Tenth Panzer Division.

Twice during the day the German tanks strongly supported by dive bombers hammered at the First's positions in the hills and ridges. Both times they failed.

By nightfall between thirty-five and forty disabled enemy tanks, including some Mark Six Tigers, were scattered about the

fields bordering the Gafsa-Gabes road. The Americans still held all key positions.

Artillery and the swift fulltrack Mark Ten American tank destroyers had done their work. So had the doughboys who stood firm while the armored spearheads rolled past them and were still holding the ground after the spearheads were blunted and rolled back.

Some tanks were knocked out by the infantry "bazooka" guns—hand rocket guns that are effective when a tank comes within range. It takes a good breed of men to stand their ground and permit tanks to roll up to this distance before firing.

After a dawn reconnaissance in force, a column of fifty to a hundred German tanks clattered along the rolling ground bordering the Gafsa-Gabes road toward Gafsa. Infantry was entrenched in foxholes and ravines.

The Americans had no tanks of their own available that morning to match the panzers. But they were rich in artillery—105's, 75-millimeter tank destroyers, the Mark Ten tank destroyers with their high-velocity three-inch guns and the big 155-millimeter American "Long Toms," a siege gun the Germans came to dread.

German artillery laid a smoke screen to cover the tanks, but it blew the wrong way and left them exposed. Doughboys held their ground while the tanks clattered past them. One tank spearhead penetrated about seven miles.

Then the artillery opened up in full force. The Germans were caught in a three-sided box with only the rear open. From the hills and gullies came the American shells by the hundreds, firing in brief concentrated salvos, then spreading with the targets.

Many American guns were of necessity emplaced in open ground. German tanks overran some of them, but their crews kept firing at point-blank range until killed.

Stukas and Messerschmitt fighter bombers hurtled down on the stolid defenders. They didn't yield.

The tank column turned back.

From a foxhole in the grassy valley floor behind the westernmost El Guettar ridge I watched the American artillery at work. We watched wave after wave of German bombers trying unsuccessfully to clear a path for the tanks. They zoomed down on the gun positions, then raced strafing along the naked road over which big American trucks were hauling badly needed ammunition.

At times the sky reverberated with the uneven beat of the German planes that made dozens of white specks in the azure sky.

We wondered where the American air force was. That night we learned. It was out of sight behind the hills, dealing unmerciful punishment to the Luftwaffe at its bases. It was pleasant to learn that some of those planes we saw dive bombing the troops never got home.

Heralded by a particularly heavy bombing attack by Ju-87's, Ju-88's and Messerschmitts, the tanks made another try at 5 p. m. Once more the artillery met them full face, and once more they turned back, having gained only one small and unimportant area.

The Germans never tried it again at El Guettar. From then on they were on the defensive.

Terry Allen's boys felt pretty good that night.

## CHAPTER FORTY-TWO

COMPANY G moved out onto the death trap ridge at El Guettar two hours before dawn Tuesday.

There were 183 of them, ordinary foot-slogging doughboys in khaki field jackets, GI pants and canvas leggings. A captain led them.

The ridge was three hundred yards of almost bare rock with a scant covering of clay shot through with gravel and a few weary weeds. It was naked if ever a position was.

They tried to dig foxholes on the rear slope. The picks and shovels could gouge out holes only eight inches deep. At dawn the German tanks rolled past them toward Gafsa. They hugged the rock and stayed put.

Shells from field guns and tanks began to splatter on their slope. Snipers on the higher ridge beyond could see them now. Every time a doughboy raised his head, a bullet pinged past. There was no way to contact their own supporting artillery and draw fire on the enemy. They were trapped, cut off from all help. Orders were to hold.

The next night one hundred fifty-three of them escaped after enduring an overpowering night infantry attack by panzer grenadiers. I met them in an oasis. They were still glassy eyed and dazed from the horror and wanted to talk. Mostly they talked revenge. There was bitter hatred in their souls from seeing German bayonets twisted in the stomachs of soldiers trying to surrender. Never, they swore, would they take any more prisoners.

Under the palm trees they sat stripped to the waist, reading mail awaiting them when they got back. It was March, but in the center of the circle lay a pile of Christmas cards and gifts from home. Nobody touched them. They were for the thirty men still out there on the ridge.

All that sunny Tuesday, they said, they had flattened themselves in their holes under steady fire. German tanks deployed just outside mortar and machine-gun range shelled them with a barrage that was "awful accurate."

Night came, and some tried to move about. Every time they raised above the skyline the German snipers fired. All the food they had was cans of cold C-rations. They tossed these from foxhole to foxhole without rising.

They were pinned to the ground so tightly that they couldn't

leave their foxholes to make a latrine. They used helmets as toilets.

Wednesday morning the shelling continued.

Private Raymond Oliver of Little Rock, Arkansas, said, "I could look up and see those 88 shells going six inches over my head. Later a concussion grenade hit at the edge of my foxhole while I was lying prone with my rifle. It made me turn a complete flip and threw me out of the foxhole."

The captain was hit, and command passed to Lieutenant Frank Jakob of Collingswood, New Jersey.

The German snipers on the opposite hill were wearing American field jackets, so Company G thought at first they were another company of their own battalion. Then the snipers hit some of them. They realized it was the enemy, too, because they were firing green tracers instead of the American red.

"The shelling got worse throughout Wednesday, and we could see the German infantry beyond getting ready to attack us," Jakob said. "The Germans were hauling up ammunition in captured American trucks and half-tracks. We just had to lie there and take it."

At 8 p. m. Wednesday, as the moon was low over the horizon, the Germans opened their heaviest artillery and mortar barrage. The earlier hammering seemed like nothing compared to this.

"A flare went up and those guns pounded the devil out of us for fifteen minutes. Then there were two more flares, and the artillery stopped.

"We saw infantry swarming up the hill at us from three sides. They outnumbered us at least two to one. We were still in our foxholes and had nothing left to fight with except rifles and grenades. The barrage had knocked out our last mortar and last machine gun."

Private Zoltan Papik of Buffalo, New York, was in the crew of that last mortar. He said it was smashed five minutes after the final barrage began. The crew members grabbed rifles.

It was the same with the machine gun. One of the crew was

sliced in half by German machine-gun fire. Then there was a direct shellhit.

Private Clark Ingrahm of Cortland, New York, a survivor of the crew, seized a rifle and fired until it jammed.

"Then I grabbed an automatic rifle and fired it. I got quite a few."

The first wave of enemy infantry was Italian to "take the rap." They were followed by waves of Germans coming in teams of four. One man wielded a machine gun or machine pistol, two men hurled grenades and the fourth carried ammunition.

Across the skyline they came at the crouching Americans. Both sides were blazing away at short range. Searing flashes illuminated the hillside as grenades exploded. Zinging tracer bullets spat against the clay.

Death was coming with lightning swiftness all around.

The Germans rushed ahead screaming like Indians. They were shouting "Show no mercy." "Kill all."

Corporal Jacque Bayer of New York City said, "Those guys wore black uniforms. Some had helmets on and some just field caps. They were all firing machine guns or throwing grenades or stabbing with bayonets. We threw grenades back. I think we got more of them than they got of us."

The Germans caught the Americans in their foxholes and ran bayonets through them from above.

Private Paul Meierle of Sheldon, Illinois, who used to be in the CCC, told about one American near him who was trapped and came out of his foxhole to surrender. The Germans shot him instead of capturing him and he dived back into his hole with an agonized cry to die.

"I was firing my rifle and hit some of them," Meierle said. "It tickled hell out of me when I heard those sons of bitches give that death scream."

The Americans stayed firm until the very end. When at last the Germans had taken the top of the hill and were milling around, Jakob gave the order for the survivors to withdraw.

"There was nothing else to do," he said. "We were overwhelmed. I ordered the men to withdraw to save useless loss of more lives."

Zoltan Papik was still firing his rifle at some Germans only ten yards away when he heard the shouted order to retreat. Torn German bodies lay grotesquely before him.

Lieutenant Jakob jumped down a thirty foot embankment to escape.

A little private known as the company jester because of his constant joking and pep-talking was still in his foxhole, paralyzed with fear.

He "froze" when Jakob gave the retreat order and wouldn't leave the hole. He lay cringing through the melee of shouting and firing.

As the others retreated down the hill they saw a German run to his foxhole and thrust a bayonet downward. There was a shivering death cry in the night.

## CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

IT WAS 3:25 P. M. on April 7, by the red and white road marker sixty-seven kilometers northwest of Gabes.

Crawling warily down the black macadam from Gafsa came a patrol of six American scout cars and jeeps. Up the road from Gabes rolled three British armored cars.

The groups examined each other with field glasses. Each thought the other might be German. The British were suspicious because of the deep cut steel helmets the Americans wore.

Almost simultaneously they recognized each other.

The lead cars drove within twenty yards.

An American sergeant in dirty GI uniform, Joseph A. Randall of State Center, Iowa, jumped from an armored car and ran forward. Out of a British car hopped a desert-hardened sergeant

in black beret and sweater. He was A. W. Acland of London.

They grinned and shook hands there on the sunbaked highway in the midst of barren, cropless fields.

"Hello, you bloody limey," Randall shouted.

"Awfully glad to see you," Acland replied.

That was the historic junction between the Eighth Army and the American Second Corps; the meeting between men who had fought their way more than 2,000 miles across Libya and Tunisia from Egypt, and those who had fought east and south from Algiers since November 8.

The Germans in the El Guettar valley who had been blocking the junction for days had absorbed all they could stand. They were fleeing north.

Less than fifty men participated in the simple, glad-handing session. As a meeting it amounted to virtually nothing. As a symbolic occasion it meant a great deal.

While the men shook hands, exchanged cigarettes and took pictures, their commanding officers compared notes. There still were Germans in the neighborhood.

Groups of American Honey tanks rattled down the road from Gafsa. They went on toward Gabes, then swung north. They had become the left flank of the Eighth Army, advancing toward Sfax through billowing clouds of dust.

Suddenly there was no more war in southern Tunisia.

At the end of the Tunisian campaign the Americans were an army good enough and mad enough to give Adolf Hitler a thorough trouncing.

Six months of fighting had taught them many things:

They had seen the enemy's bag of tricks and learned the answers. They knew from experience now how to attack, how to defend themselves.

They had outgrown the idea that any American can automatically lick any five Germans, just because he is an American fighting with American equipment. They learned that strong

men and splendid equipment don't necessarily make a winning army. It takes spirit, determination and experience.

They had progressed in their attitude from the maneuver complex to the killer theme. No longer were the Germans just an impersonal enemy to be dealt with like a chess opponent. They were cruel, hard, flesh and blood men who would kill you with considerable pleasure unless you got them first.

Americans had learned to die. It wasn't flag waving and patriotic songs any more. It was stark reality.

They were physically tough. All the calisthenics and games in the world can't do for a man what six weeks in the field will do.

They had found that their British allies are fine soldiers. It was soul-satisfying to see the improvement in Anglo-American relations as the campaign wore on. Not that they ever were bad. But the Americans came into the campaign with a bit of the "We'll show 'em how" attitude. They didn't go in for that strategic withdrawal stuff.

The British, on the other hand, had a touch of that "Why, the young upstart" feeling. They couldn't quite accept the idea that a nation making its first campaign east of the Atlantic could fly quite as well or fight quite as skillfully as old hands who had been at it since September, 1939.

One of the finest tributes I ever heard paid to the British army was by a tough Polish ex-truck driver from the south side of Chicago.

He said: "Geez, these limeys got guts!"

Mutual danger and mutual objectives bred growing respect in Tunisia. At the end it was truly an allied force.

Most of all, the Americans knew at the finish that they could lick the Germans. Hadn't they done it? What a morale factor success is!

The Americans really hit their peak in those final ten days of the campaign. From the time of Kasserine, they had been improving steadily. Some units were much better than others.

But in the tangled underbrush of the wild hills west of Mateur,

units that popularly had been considered "weak" units proved themselves splendidly. They did things, took hills, that many observers never expected.

Everywhere, from Medjez-el-Bab to Enfidaville, there was cheering among the British for the deeds of their American allies.

Particularly there was praise for the American artillery. German prisoners bemoaned its accuracy and abundance. Especially they dreaded the big "Long Toms" that throw shells some twelve miles.

The American divisions that fought in Tunisia are ready for Europe. It is unfortunate that more divisions didn't receive the essential combat experience. The Tunisian campaign ended so swiftly that additional waiting divisions weren't given a chance.

Those who fought, however, are prepared. They know it is a long, long way from Bizerte to Berlin, but they feel that for them the first step was the hardest.

Tunisia was a great teacher.



PART X

*HEEL OF ACHILLES*

*By Ned Russell  
John Parris*



## CHAPTER FORTY-FOUR

SOMEWHERE far north of the Mareth Line, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel halted his car, let the dust settle and then looked back. As far as he could see there were rolling vehicles spreading a screen of dust across the Tunisian countryside. His Afrika Korps was running for its life, over roads that had known the tread of soldiers of Rome and Carthage.

Above the rolling cloud of dust roared fighters and bombers of the United Nations air force. The air was theirs this April afternoon and they were pasting the hell out of the Afrika Korps. Back down there somewhere was the British Eighth Army, rolling like a giant tidal wave, licking at the heels of the fleeing Axis troops.

Rommel and his surviving troops were in tortured retreat from the fallen Mareth Line. Every strongpoint of the "Little Maginot" fortifications in southern Tunisia was in British hands.

The Desert Fox knew that the chase was nearing an end. A man couldn't run forever. Rommel was running close to the sea and up ahead there wasn't much territory left to fight in. The Allies were closing in. Rommel had to find some place to catch his breath again. Somewhere up there ahead he would try to make another stand.

As Rommel stood there looking back he must have remembered Hitler's last orders. "Hold and harry," they had been. Hold and harry until the cows come home. But then Hitler didn't have the Eighth Army on his heels. The Eighth Army had hammered Rommel's men out of entrenched positions at El Alamein and chased them thirteen hundred miles across Libya. It had driven the Germans out of the Mareth Line and was now a hundred miles north and still rolling.

Rommel wiped the sweat from his face and rubbed the dust from his eyes. A cold wind was blowing down from the hills and across the plains and ruffling the palms along the edge of the sea. Dusk was gathering when Rommel finally started his car along the track again. Night was coming on and there was only darkness ahead.

Tunisia was getting to be an uncomfortable place. American troops were pushing from the west down there in southern Tunisia, trying to drive a wedge to the sea and cut off Rommel's retreat. Yank infantry, hammering ahead through fierce mortar and artillery fire, captured the German stronghold of Djebel Mcheltat, a 1,500-foot hill. The boys in khaki crept forward over hills and through ravines, slowly gaining ground in a tough, slugging battle which demanded a fight for every yard gained.

It was all part of a big, new push for the sea which hit the German mountain line in three places in an attempt to break through the last hill barriers to the coastal plain of Tunisia.

The biggest attack was a strong thrust through the hills along both sides of the Gabes road, nine miles southeast of El Guettar. The Americans were attempting to capture the enemy's entrenched positions and gain control of the heights dominating the road to Gabes.

In the northern end of the American sector, our troops developed a threat to the holy city of Kairouan in their second attack. The third action was an artillery duel for high ground east of Maknassy.

Lying on an Italian overcoat left by a former occupant when he fled hurriedly several days ago, you could see from what once was an Italian observation post on a dusty, wind-blown ridge the Americans go into action. The battle lasted daylong as the Germans fought for these hill positions which guarded their route of retreat along the coast.

The enemy was dug in behind barbed wire and his mortars and artillery were trained on two points so that they could score

against our advancing forces. At one point, the Americans advanced three-quarters of a mile and at others slightly more.

Our men went into action at dawn. Some of them advanced along the northern slope of Djebel Berda, where the German supply road ran across a salt lake into the road to Gabes.

Others, infiltrating over high ground that skirted the bases of the mountains forming the northern edge of the valley smashed toward the key point of this sector—Djebel Mcheltat.

The German air force was absent all day and the American planes were handicapped by mist covering the ground.

From my observation point, I could look forward across the semi-arid valley to the southern shoulder of Mcheltat. I saw American vehicles creeping forward along the foot of the mountain, raising clouds of dust and dodging into gullies as German artillery laid salvos along their path.

Our artillery, firing from behind my position, laid salvos on the slopes of Mcheltat. During a one-minute period in mid-morning, the concentrated American barrage laid 1,000 pounds of explosives on the heights but the Germans clung to their position.

The Germans, in higher ground than our troops, took advantage of their superior observation posts and gun positions to lay direct fire on our jeeps and trucks scouting across the valley.

Captain Percy L. Smith of Dayton, New Jersey, assistant regimental surgeon, was driving a jeep around a bend into an exposed position. A shell exploded forty yards away.

"Our boys are taking cover behind the rocks, trying to work forward against the German shellfire, but it's tough going," Smith said. "A number of them are injured and lying in the valley but the shellfire is so intense that stretcherbearers are unable to reach them. They'll just have to lie there until dark."

The Americans were fighting now. They were getting mad. The green was wearing off. They wanted to kill Germans. Kasserine had done that for them. That was where they won their

letter, there in the second battle of Kasserine. Now they were on the march and there was no stopping them.

Rommel was losing more and more men with every coming night. Somewhere along the road from the Mareth Line he had dropped 30,000 of them.

It wasn't that Rommel was going to give up. His Fuehrer had told him to hold on to Tunisia as long as he could, and he was setting himself to the task in the only way he knew. He told Berlin to send him reinforcements and Berlin sent them over by air but the big transports were duck soup to the boys of the United Nations up there over the Mediterranean.

In forty-eight hours Allied pilots knocked down sixty-one Junkers-52 transports carrying men, ammunition and gasoline to the harried Nazi forces. A big part of the German army was ending up in the sea.

Another big hunk of the *Wehrmacht* was stretched out on the burning Tunisian earth, dead beside its vehicles.

In the south the Allies were striking hard. One column swung off from the coast road and dashed hell-for-leather for La Fauconnerie. Another column plowed toward the same Godforsaken town from positions between Maknassy and Messouna. Still another column cracked Faid Pass and turned north toward Kairouan.

In the north, by Tunis and Bizerte, Von Arnim was not much better off. The British First Army hammered at his positions, and on one front, between Munchar and Medjez-el-Bab, the British were only twenty-seven miles from Tunis. Another British force advanced on Mateur, south of Bizerte, and still another swung along the edge of Cape Serrat.

The ring of steel was tightening closer about the Germans. Closer and closer the Germans drew in, and faster and faster the British and Americans came after them. It was not a war. It was a race.

In the south there were no longer any positions. It was pure movement. Down roads. Over deserts. Across hills.

Rommel wasn't taking time to look over his shoulder.

One night a car pulled up to a German airdrome somewhere on the coast. The man who got out of the car was tall and dusty and bundled in a big leather overcoat. He stalked into a dugout. A few minutes later mechanics began warming up a plane. The tall man came out, climbed aboard the plane. The plane circled once and then headed out to sea and toward Sicily and the mainland.

Erwin Rommel had said good-by to Tunisia.

## CHAPTER FORTY-FIVE

IN THE blacked-out stone building just off the Algiers waterfront the presses had rolled all night.

A half dozen American soldiers were busy at the back of the building loading bundles into a couple of army lorries.

"What's this stuff we're loading?" a sleepy-eyed private from Maine wanted to know.

"Printed matter," replied the sergeant from Jersey.

"Hell, I know it's printed matter," said the boy from Maine, "but why is it so important we have to stay up all night loading these trucks?"

"The captain said there's a message to the Italian soldiers printed on that stuff," finally admitted the sergeant.

"What? Christmas greetings in April?"

"Don't know. I can't read Italian. Anyway, get on with the job and let's get the hell off and have some coffee."

When the last bundle had been stacked aboard the trucks, the sergeant said to the drivers, "Take it away."

The trucks lumbered out of the alley and headed toward Maison Blanche airdrome.

It was just getting light.

A couple of transports were being warmed up on the tarmac.

The trucks were unloaded and the bundles transferred to the

planes. It didn't take long and soon the transports were winging off east and toward the front.

The transports put down at a forward airdrome and there the boys in the bombers took over.

"I hear we're carrying paper instead of bombs today," said a lieutenant from Georgia.

"Maybe we ought to put some rocks in these leaflets," suggested a red-haired kid from Alabama.

The bombers took off and fanned out over that part of Tunisia where Italian and German soldiers were holed-in, fighting with their backs to the sea and no place to go. The ferries had suddenly stopped running to Sicily and Italy.

A kid from Brooklyn who read Italian picked up one of the leaflets and began reading as his bomber winged out across the hills and mountains toward Tunis.

"What do you know," he spoke into the inter-com to his pals. "This thing says that Rommel has done a fadeout. Skipped and left the Eyeties holding the bag."

The American planes rolled on toward their objectives and finally got over that patch of territory where the Axis troops were still holding on. Then the bomb doors opened and leaflets, hundreds and hundreds of them, fluttered down.

They bore messages in both Italian and German.

The date was April 26.

The Americans were telling the Axis troops something they didn't know—that Rommel had fled. Axis prisoners later admitted that was the first they knew that the Desert Fox had flown.

The Italians were told that the Nazis again had betrayed them. They were told that any attempted evacuation would produce the "greatest holocaust of history."

Down there in the hills and on the edge of the plain where the leaflets fell, the Italians read that the Germans were preparing to get out of Tunisia, following the example of Rommel, and leave them holding the bag.

German soldiers read that the Axis command had abandoned hope of holding the bridgehead. The Germans were promised nothing but calamity, whatever course the final battle might take.

"Once more you have been betrayed by the Germans," the message to the Italians said. "Field Marshal Rommel has left Tunisia. Rommel and his whole staff have fled from Tunisia. Rommel knows he is beaten in Tunisia, as he was beaten in Egypt, in Cyrenaica, in Tripolitania and on the Mareth Line.

"Italian soldiers, Rommel has left you to face the full weight of the vast American and British armies. You will be caught between our armies on one side and perilous seas on the other.

"The Germans have already arranged to take your ships. They will try to escape to Sicily. But few will ever see land again.

"Do you want to escape from certain destruction? This is your last chance. There is only one way out. Come over to us and thus save your lives."

The Germans were told that the common soldier was being left behind as cannon fodder, while officers and technicians escaped.

The Italians were war-weary. They had run themselves out. There didn't seem much chance of their ever getting home again. And, after all, there really wasn't much to go back to. Maybe some of them, quite a few of them, began thinking that Monday about giving themselves up.

From that day onward a lot of Italians found their way to American and British camps.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SIX

BY MID-APRIL the Tunisian battlefield was less than the size of Connecticut and getting gradually smaller every day.

The British-American-French line stretched northwestward

some one hundred twenty miles from a point near Enfidaville, on the Gulf of Hammamet, to Cape Serrat, on the north Tunisian shore.

Montgomery's Eighth Army stood on the southern wing, the French Nineteenth Corps and the American Second Corps in the center, and the British First Army in the north.

Inside this box an army of nearly 200,000 Germans and Italians were penned. Around it strong and battle-tried Allied armies began moving, inching forward a little each day, a little more each night.

While the Eighth Army gathered strength behind its patrols for a new thrust near the coast, the First Army struck in the central zone. Fighting in country so rugged motorized transport had to be discarded in favor of mule trains, the First Army battered German defenses and took Djebel Ang, a 2,204-foot, cliff-flanked height which on a clear day commands a view of both Tunis and Bizerte.

Farther south, French troops captured another strategic height called Djebel Sefsouf.

The American Second Corps struck in the north.

American infantry advanced on the town of Jefna while Allied ground forces slashed deeper into key sectors to within twenty-one airline miles of Tunis.

The Germans and Italians in strong positions were fighting desperately to prevent an Allied breakthrough to the Tunis plains—only four miles away in the Pont-du-Fahs sector.

By April 25 hard fighting was sweeping the whole Tunisian front. Allied forces edged a few miles east of Medjez-el-Bab. French Goumiers crossed and cut the road between Pont-du-Fahs and Enfidaville. The Eighth Army gained a few miles in hard fighting in the hills southeast of Pont-du-Fahs.

In the extreme northern sector, the French advanced along the coast to a point less than five miles from the inland lake known as Garaet Achkel and about twenty miles from Bizerte.

The American Second Corps, fighting along the Sedjenane

road toward Mateur, drove the enemy off Djebel Dardyse, which lies six miles west of Garaet Achkel. A few miles farther south the Americans captured two strategic hills called Djebel Azzag and Djebel Ajred, which lie on opposite sides of the road from Sedjenane to Mateur.

Moving against the village of Jefna, twelve miles from Mateur, the Americans stormed two hills rising 1,200 and 1,500 feet and consolidated their positions and then began pushing forward in heavy mine fields.

In a secret, lightning shift, thousands of American troops were moved to the north Tunisian front. And to let the Germans know they were there, they struck six miles into the Axis defense lines in a general Allied offensive that rolled the enemy back as much as seven miles toward the beaches of Tunis on the British sector.

The date was April 23.

Aided by a record-breaking Allied aerial assault, the British First Army, the American Second Corps and the Corps France d'Afrique slugged their way with infantry into the Axis western flank while the Eighth Army fought off desperate counter-attacks on the coastal road to Bou Fiche.

The Germans, despite a furious pounding by fifteen hundred Allied aerial sorties that virtually drove the vaunted Luftwaffe from the Tunisian skies, fought desperately on every front against the massed Allied weight and casualties were heavy on both sides.

The Americans went into action on the road from Sedjenane to Mateur, twenty miles southwest of Bizerte, after tens of thousands of men and thousands of vehicles had been moved from the southern front near Maknassy with speed and secrecy that drew warm praise from General Sir Harold Alexander, who coordinated their operations with the British First Army attack.

"The senior British officers have the fullest admiration for the excellent staff work and particularly for the speed and secrecy with which the move was carried out by the Second Corps,"

General Alexander said in a statement issued from his headquarters.

"When the El Guettar battle was finished it was decided to employ some United States Army troops in another sector for the next step toward the final phase that will see the annihilation of the Afrika Korps, Von Arnim's army and their Italian allies in Tunisia. The terrain chosen was in the northern area in which contact was first made with the enemy in this campaign and where some of the fiercest fighting has taken place.

"This decision involved the movement of large numbers of troops and great quantities of stores and equipment along the whole length of the front, and senior British officers have the fullest admiration for the excellent staff work.

"They equally praised the excellent discipline of the United States Army troops on roads crossing several mountain ranges which so constantly dissolving into seas of mud a few weeks ago are now disintegrating into clouds of powdery dust, which covers the drivers and passengers alike with gray, floury coating.

"The roads were kept open by incessant work of the engineers equipped with some of the most modern mechanical road-making equipment in the world."

The American forces were from the Second Corps under Lieutenant-General George S. Patton, Jr., which had previously fought on the British Eighth Army flank in southern Tunisia, diverting some thirty-five thousand Nazi troops at a critical moment of the battle for the Mareth Line and finally making a junction with the Eighth Army.

This new country where the Americans were operating is one of the roughest areas of northern Tunisia. It meant fighting hard for every mile they advanced. Here they learned to become crafty and battle-hardened.

The American attack began at dawn of April twenty-third in the hills north of the Mateur road with Djebel Marata and Djebel Ainchouna, five miles south, as the first objectives.

The fighting there was something to write home about. It

marked the Americans as first-rate fighting men against the best that the Nazis could offer.

The Germans tried to trap the Yanks. They apparently believed the Americans were green troops. But they failed.

Scrambling through intense German mortar and artillery fire, the Americans captured the two main hill positions and then withstood several sharp enemy counter-attacks before they could consolidate their new positions.

South of the Mateur road another American infantry outfit assaulted Djebel Rmel, a strongly entrenched position northeast of Oued Zarga, and captured it quickly. The Germans counter-attacked, supported by a fierce artillery barrage. The Americans stood their ground. The Germans couldn't drive them off the hill, but the fighting continued.

It was the day after Easter Sunday and American infantrymen were jabbing cautiously at retreating German forces in the rugged hill country west of Mateur. German resistance, centered in a semi-circular series of hills with the Jebel Sidi Mefah on one side, appeared to be softening.

A captain from Idaho came in from the northern end of the Americans' five-mile front and reported that German instructors were fighting in the enemy's front lines, apparently rushed in as replacements to help stem the retreat.

Hammered for more than sixty-five hours by American artillery and pounded from the air without a let-up, the Germans were pulling out so fast they were leaving their dead unburied on the hillsides.

The American commanders, fearing an enemy attempt to establish a mousetrap in the hills before Mateur, pushed forward slowly, feeling out the Axis strongpoints.

American 155-mm. "Long Toms" and 105-mm. howitzers poured a steady rain of fire into the German supply lines. The Axis ground troops were taking severe punishment. Allied air support was the best that the American infantrymen had received in the Tunisian campaign.

Whenever a regimental commander in the sector called for bombers to "touch up" a certain enemy hill position, a flight of American A-20 Boston attack bombers were usually on the target within an hour.

We asked Captain Bidwell Moore, a well-built fellow with a ready smile of Staten Island, New York, why the Germans were moving out so fast.

"That's what we would like to know," Moore replied. "Apparently the Germans have been ordered back five or six miles, because we had been out scouting all day without making contact with the enemy until late this afternoon, when we had a bit of a skirmish just before we went into an Arab village atop a hill."

An American general didn't have an explanation for the Germans walking out, either.

"It's just like having two boxers in a ring," the general said. "Naturally, the guy that's getting it on the chin every round is going to start bicycling. So far we have been able to reach out and slap the enemy right on the button every time. That's what happens when the team gets going."

The fighting started on a five-mile front running from Sedjenane southeastward to a point nine miles north of Medjez-el-Bab. For more than forty hours the Yanks hammered at the hill that was their immediate objective—the same hill where entrenched Germans threw back two British attacks six weeks before.

Finally at 2 A. M., April 26, fifty-six American artillery pieces, including the "Long Tom" 155's, 105's, and others, opened up. For exactly forty-five minutes they sent screaming shells into the hillsides, gouging out hunks of earth and rock. When they quit, American infantry stormed up and found it had been vacated during the night.

A few Germans, ready to give up, were lurking in caves and the eastern side of the hill literally was covered with dead. The Yanks halted long enough to take out their spades and bury the

dead—the first time Americans had had that job in North Africa, because before the Nazis had been particular about doing it themselves before clearing out. This time they didn't have time. The shelling was too much for them.

We pulled up the rocky slope and at the top stood tall, sweating Lieutenant-Colonel Clarence Beck of Daytona Beach, Florida.

"It looks like the Germans had a bellyfull of us," he said disgustedly. "When the boys started out this morning they were mad at the Germans, who had been whipping 88's at them for two days. They didn't find any prisoners, only a couple, one wounded and another a Czech who'd had all the fight taken out of him."

The colonel said that the Czech told American soldiers that his outfit was so battered it was afraid to leave foxholes for two days and nights.

At 5:30 P. M. orders came up for the infantrymen that captured the hill to move on to another, and a voice came back:

"We had enough taking this hunk of rock; it's a wonder you wouldn't let us sit on it a while."

By day's end when the movements over the hills had wound up the Americans were facing a semicircular series of hills twelve miles southwest of Mateur, with Djebel Sidi Mefah on one side, Djebel Smala at the bottom and Bon Hamra running along the other side and a valley in between.

About the time the order to advance was given late in the day, a telephone rang in regional headquarters. Captain John C. Kelly, of Brockton, Massachusetts, looked up from his map table, answered and then announced in a casual tone:

"We've just taken another hill."

Troops moving eastward in the Sedjenane area were taking hill after hill and finding German instructors fighting in the enemy ranks, evidently hurried down as badly needed replacements.

Just a scant quarter of a mile from the fighting was an Ameri-

can observation post. The officer in command said he'd had a job trying to keep the observation post secret.

"From the parade we've had it looks like Broadway," the officer said grinning. "But I can tell you it isn't Broadway, not by a hell of a long shot."

He said there had been one lieutenant general, two major generals and two brigadier generals and "the boss is getting pretty touchy."

When anyone stepped out to move from one covered point to another German 88 shells came whining in.

On the road just back of the observation post were the wrecks of seven German tanks the British had destroyed weeks before, and there was a bridge American engineers had built. They had labeled it, "Brooklyn Bridge."

Here in the last days of April the Allied armies hacked their way into the enemy's mountain defenses and onto the coastal plain sunk amid the peaks of North Tunisia.

Fighting reached its fiercest of the entire campaign. The Allies and the Germans fought at close quarters with bayonets and rifles. By night they fought in silvery moonlit gulches. During the day they drove at each other, sparred and killed on the sun-splashed hillsides.

The First Army battered its way through the peak-studded central zone, driving the Germans off most of Longstop Hill, a battle-scarred, heavily fortified height commanding the north central pass leading from Medjez-el-Bab to Tebourba and thence to Tunis.

The Eighth Army began cracking German defenses flanking the eastern coastal road. With machetes they hacked their way through thick cactus hedges toward the village of Takrouna perched atop a six-hundred-foot summit. The hill fell to the Tommies after forty-eight hours of bitter fighting, sometimes hand-to-hand with bayonets and knives. The victory followed the fall of Enfidaville and opened the way toward strongly forti-

fied rows of hills lying to the north and protecting Cape Bon Peninsula.

The sun came up fast and hot that last day in April. This was the day destined to open the way to Mateur and the approaches to Bizerte. On the colonel's military map it was listed as "Hill 609." The Arabs called it Djebel Tahent, a two-thousand-foot, mesa-topped hill four miles east of Sidi N-Sir.

In the fields below, the wind ruffled through the wheat. On the slopes of Hill 609 the poppies bent their heads and you thought of Flanders and its fields.

The Americans had sent reconnaissance units around it on the north to within three miles of Garaet Achkel and within twenty miles of Bizerte, which drove within ten miles of Mateur and were shelling that important junction. As long as Hill 609 held out no major operations could be undertaken on either side and the Americans were ordered to take it at all costs. Only one hundred and eighty Germans manned the hill, but they were first-line material and tough. They were so deeply emplaced in foxholes blasted out of granite that American guns could not reach them and the German mortars and machine guns exacted a heavy toll each time the American boys tried to climb the slopes.

Once the Yanks took three small approach heights and battled their way half a mile up the main slope only to be thrown back by withering fire.

The American "Long Toms" walked across the hill after that, blasting away at the German emplacements. Fighter-bombers winged in at zero altitude and smacked at the German gun positions. Sweat rolled down the faces of the Americans as they battled to scale that height. There had been another place like Hill 609. Remember Missionary Ridge and Sheridan's boys in blue?

Just below the summit was an Arab village. The Germans had taken it over and fortified it. This was one of their main strong-points.

The Yanks started up the slope again and moved on the village. The "Long Toms" hurled shells over their heads and into the village. Soon it was a ruins, blasted to dust and rubble.

As Yanks fell their places were filled, the ranks closed up. On and on they moved, ever upward. Finally they reached the summit. From the opposite side the Germans unloosed another barrage. The Yanks kept coming, across the summit and then down on the other side. Then came the cold steel.

The Germans had been ordered to hold Hill 609 fourteen days. They held it less than fourteen hours after the Yanks started moving against it.

That Friday, April 30, may go down in the records as one of the most important days of the war. For that was the day the Americans proved they could fight; proved they could go against the best the Axis had to offer—and win.

Green a month before, the Americans became soldiers, real fighting soldiers on Hill 609. Soldiers capable of forcing their way through tough mountain terrain in hard, bitter fighting and then getting up their heavy weapons on schedule to maintain their gains.

The fighting the Americans faced probably was not the intense, close-range stuff which the infantrymen went through beyond Medjez-el-Bab on the way to Tunis. But they ran into the stiffest sort of resistance. It included struggles within hand-grenade range, some even within bayonet reach.

They fought well. Nobody can deny them that. And they were all the better soldiers for it as they pushed on toward Mateur.

Bearded, lean and dust-stained, these Americans who not so long ago were playing football, working at the corner drugstore, studying law and medicine and mechanics, and doing the things people do who are above and beyond the clash of steel, wrote a glorious page in American military history.

The history books probably will not even find space to mention that action at Hill 609, but let it be said now that was the

place a bunch of Yanks found themselves and became real soldiers.

At the end of fourteen hours the Americans had gone a long way as experience is measured. They held a key position.

The firing moved on, over Mateur way. Hill 609 was quiet again and the Stars and Stripes were planted on its summit. On its slopes American boys lay dead among the poppies. Across the summit lay the German dead.

Hill 609, taken in one of the most gallant actions of the Tunisian campaign, was in Allied hands.

The road to Mateur was open. The way was paved for major operations.

Americans had died, many of them there on Hill 609, but they had not died in vain. Mateur fell three days later. American troops captured the German communications base May 3.

The Germans started a general retreat at dawn after a long night of incessant bombardment by American artillery. The withdrawal spread to the entire southern flank of the American sector and it became so precipitate that the Americans lost contact with the enemy at some points.

Capture of Hill 609 forced the German withdrawal and prepared the way for the biggest American victory of the Tunisian campaign.

After taking Hill 609 the Americans were thrown off two smaller hills near by. But they held to flat-topped 609. On Saturday the infantrymen recaptured the two smaller hills.

Saturday night the Americans started working on the two remaining enemy positions of importance, Green and Bald Hills. A detachment armed with knives slipped up the slopes of Bald Hill, surprised a German outpost and killed eleven Germans.

On Sunday the Americans captured both Green and Bald Hills, which had stood like fortresses in what is called the Jefna position west of Mateur. Enveloping tactics won the hills.

Then, south of Mateur, the Americans skirted the "mouse-

trap" mountain formation and occupied Borj-bou-Hamra, at a crossroad. The Americans then completed the occupation of Hill 558, on the edge of the plain south of Mateur and the end was in sight.

The American victory was made at high cost in lives against determined and seasoned German troops, who knew all the tricks and were in defenses that had been months in the making.

It was an infantry victory. Americans from many states wormed their way through ravines and small valleys, crossed open terrain, struggled up rocky slopes, always under fire by German guns, mortars and machine guns emplaced to cover all approaches.

Heavy weapons were out and bad weather impeded the operation of American planes.

The toughness of the fighting was indicated by the number of times that the Americans had been held up, or, after having taken a hill and left dead and wounded comrades behind, had been forced to withdraw before enemy counter-attacks.

But they kept on doggedly and on May 3 the Germans took the only course left to them—retreat.

A single American half-track commanded by a captain from Dallas, Texas, captured Mateur after a two-shot battle.

The two shots killed two Germans.

The half-track then swung on through Mateur and up the road running around the west side of Garaet Achkel. At a small crossroad, twenty-eight-year-old Captain Alfred H. McCutcheon jumped out and shook hands with the men of a small company which had been under fire in the bush country for three days.

Exactly one week before the two forces were fifty miles apart.

Their meeting resulted in the pocketing of hundreds of Germans and Italians in a huge circle sprawling westward from that crossroad to Sedjenane, thence southward to Sidi N'Sir, and on northeastward to Mateur.

Only the day before an American infantry unit, launching an ambitious attack at dawn, ran into a trap in which scores were

killed, at least 210 missing—presumed captured—and 120 wounded. But the Yanks bounced back with a vengeance.

A single infantry company, sole survivors of the unit, hurled back three sharp counter-attacks and probably broke the back of the main German and Italian counter-offensive against a high hill dominating the entire American flank south of Mateur.

Their gallant stand resulted in the general German withdrawal.

## CHAPTER FORTY-SEVEN

LIKE a stoutly constructed wall that has been sledge-hammered repeatedly, the Axis defenses in North Tunisia began slowly cracking and yielding.

This was evident after a 180-mile tour of battle positions held by the American Second Corps and the French on May 5.

As we completed a swing to key sectors of the American front extending within six miles of the north coast, word came from the south that the Second Corps had captured Eddekhila, thirteen miles below Mateur and only six miles from the key junction of Tebourba on the road to Tunis.

The story was the same—slow, steady progress—on the entire American and French front in the north.

On the northernmost flank near the so-called Bizerte Neck, we followed a hard-driving patrol that yesterday cracked the ever-weakening enemy defenses manned by Germans, Italians and an Arab Free Corps and pushed to within a dozen miles of Bizerte.

On the north front from Mateur an American armored reconnaissance unit slogged through soft, mushy ground to attack Djebel Achkel, at the southern edge of the lake of the same name, where the enemy appeared to be making a stand with artillery.

Dive-bombers swept out of the east on the Mateur front and swooped to within a hundred feet of a bridge over which we had just rolled and dropped their bombs. Then they winged over

Mateur and dropped more bombs, but the damage could not even be recognized a few minutes later because the town had been so thoroughly smashed by American artillery before the Germans finally pulled out.

There was only sporadic shelling as we rolled along the west side of Lake Achkel and southward to Sidi N'Sir, but it was significant that there was not any other evidence of enemy action and only two hostile planes were sighted.

Our journey along the front extended past the famed Green and Bald Hills, where the American Second Corps avenged the loss of many American and British soldiers; to the Bizerte Neck, only six miles from the Mediterranean coast, and thence eastward to where one of our patrols was moving on to Djebel Chemti and thence southward to Mateur and on to Sidi N'Sir.

The American patrol in the Djebel Chemti sector slipped up the western slopes of the hill on the north side of Lake Achkel, just at the crossroads where the main highway runs southwest from Bizerte and forms a fork. The right fork runs southward around the west side of the lake and the left fork branches eastward down the east side to German-held Ferryville, reputed to be one of the best fortified points in Tunisia.

Our gains in this sector threatened the enemy positions at Ferryville from the north while other American units were within five miles of the fort on the south.

But it was south of Mateur that we saw what may be the most important operations. There American forces were swinging into position in preparation for a drive to crack enemy defenses guarding the Tunis plain.

The Germans had fallen back thirteen miles in this sector to take advantage of the high ground around Eddekhila, which lies thirteen miles south and slightly east of Mateur. This withdrawal was necessary for the Germans in order to keep the path open for shifting their defensive strength northward to meet American armor based on Mateur.

The Americans pushed on rapidly and captured Eddekhila.

Back at corps headquarters a general said it looked as if Von Arnim was giving up his strongest positions and massing his main forces around Tunis and Cape Bon.

"I've got my fingers crossed," he said, "but it looks like the jig is up for the Axis. We're rolling now. From now on every hour counts."

While the general talked, American patrols were creeping through the undergrowth and marshes in a hundred places near the Bizerte lakes. Sappers worked as the Germans and Italians fell back, blowing up bridges, exploring craters in the roads and digging up mines.

Behind the sappers long lines of Allied guns, tanks and men waited to push through.

The Big Push was about to begin for the last Axis strongpoints in Africa.

## CHAPTER FORTY-EIGHT

A DEEPENING sense of imminent, decisive action hung over the Tunisian front in the early hours of May 6. Along the forty-mile battle line that stretched from the Medjez-el-Bab area northwards beyond the Bizerte lakes district, British, American and French soldiers, campaign-hardened and confident now, waited for the zero hour.

A cold wind whipped down from the hills. Thousands of men looked at their watches. They stood tense and waiting. The big guns were ready to go into action, the tanks were lined up, and the tough infantrymen gripped their rifles. On a score of Allied airdromes, American and British pilots climbed into their ships.

Up and down that line of steel men talked in whispers, as men do when facing danger.

Two American doughboys who had fought at Hill 609, marched into Mateur and beyond, stood in the shadow of a tank talking. It was getting light in the east.

"Won't be long now," said the boy from Pennsylvania.

"Nope," said the boy from Tennessee. "The big guns'll start barking any minute."

His words seemed to be a signal, for all hell broke loose. Four hundred guns started blazing, laying down a devastating barrage.

American and British armies had started a general offensive against the crumbling defenses of shell-scarred Bizerte and the gateway to Tunis.

At 10 A. M. the infantry and tanks went in. One force moved past Bou Aoukaz towards Tebourba, key to the defense of Tunis. Another struck in the direction of Massicault.

Thrown into the attack was the greatest mass of men ever assembled on a narrow front during the whole African campaign.

Allied air support was tremendous. Hundreds of bombers and fighter-bombers blasted and strafed the Germans from their strongholds. Several concentrations of field and anti-tank guns were wiped out.

General Patton's American forces first took Mount Achkel, south of Lake Achkel, and then stormed Mount Cheniti, on the northern shore, the last obstacle, and swung down on the main road going northeast to Bizerte. The French were cooperating strongly with the Americans.

The Americans were battering at the outer defenses of Bizerte where docks and shipyards blazed from shell and bomb.

Cooperating in the Tunis drive, other American forces drove to within less than five miles of Tebourba. Another column coming from Mateur speeded down the road to Djedeida, a junction four miles east of Tebourba, and threatened to outflank the enemy.

The British First Army, after a sensational ten-mile advance, stormed into Massicault and pushed on eastward. The Tommies could see smoke rising from the German guns in Tunis.

The final phase of the battle for Tunisia had exploded against the trapped Axis forces.

One after another the German guns across the Bizerte lakes district fell silent, blotted out by accurate Allied artillery and bombs.

Von Arnim started moving his men from the Bizerte area southward toward Tunis and Cape Bon for the last stand.

As the American forces pushed into new villages, French residents said that the retiring enemy columns were in straggling groups, looking beaten as they fell back from Mateur area. Walking wounded were sent on foot from the town of Michaud to Ferryville, and long streams of enemy transport carrying war supplies moved from Bizerte southward toward Tunis.

From the hills there above the valley before Bizerte we looked down upon fields of ripening corn and harvested wheat, standing in hundreds of yellow stacks. And then we started down into the valley toward Bizerte, following the infantry and the tanks.

The valley stretched vivid yellow in the sun before we reached it. But as the day advanced this all disappeared into a gray dust storm. Tens of thousands of men and vehicles poured down the dust tracks and sweated in the torturing heat.

The valley turned from yellow to gray, and where it had once seemed so youthful it now looked old and worn and exhausted.

The sun went down and the Allied columns pushed on toward their two main objectives, never faltering, while the Germans and Italians fell back and kept falling back.

The advance went on through the night.

General Alexander sent out an order of the day to the Allied forces at dawn of May 7th to drive the enemy into the sea.

The British First Army tank advance started after 8:30 A. M. on the heights near St. Cyprien, ten miles from Tunis, and carried to the outskirts of the capital by noon.

The Americans and French in the north captured another thousand prisoners, took four important hill features, hammered at the road junction of Ferryville after mopping up a bitter-end German garrison on a nearby hill. They seized Djebel Zarour, south of Lake Bizerte, and cleared the hills southwest of the vital

Chouigui Pass, only six miles northeast of Tebourba, which was being threatened from three sides.

Ferryville, on the southwest corner of Lake Bizerte, fell to an American armored reconnaissance unit at 12:55 P. M.

The Americans immediately swung on to Bizerte, which was also under attack by Americans and French from the coastal sector north of Lake Achkel. The outskirts of the town were penetrated and captured a short time later.

The British First Army found itself fighting in the outskirts of Tunis early in the afternoon after its tanks had crashed a dozen miles across the rolling plains to seize the town of Le Bardo, site of the palace of the Bey of Tunis only a mile and a half from the capital, and the race track, only four miles from the heart of the city.

Promptly at 12:35 P. M., a British 25-pounder pumped six token shells into Tunis "for historical purposes" only and brought to an end one of the greatest offensives in British military history.

A patrol of the Eighth Army's Eleventh Hussars, with the red desert rat insignia—first into Bengasi and the first into Tripoli—arrived at a junction of two roads from Tebourba and Medjezel-Bab four kilometers outside the city limits of Tunis just after 4 P. M.

Just behind the Eighth Army's famous armored scouts came a detachment of armored scouts of the First Army's Derbyshire Yeomanry.

The Eleventh Hussars won for the Eighth Army the honor of being the first to enter Tunis and they rolled down into the city to the cheers of the population.

The four hundred officers and sergeants had been prisoners in the red stucco building for days, waiting for a ship to take them to Italy. Still wearing their steel helmets, they sat glumly on the floor. There were no cigarettes; there was nothing to eat. Time pressed heavily on them and the city was strangely silent.

Down the street came a roar and a clatter. The Germans must

be moving up more armor, the prisoners thought. A big sergeant of the Derbyshire Yeomanry climbed wearily to his feet and walked to a window. He looked out languidly. Then his eyes nearly popped out of his head.

Along the street was coming a dusty line of armored cars, men standing in their turrets, guns at the alert. The big sergeant looked closer. They were British. He recognized the red desert rat insignia of the Eleventh Hussars. The sergeant began to yell his head off. And then he saw, bringing up the rear, his own Derbyshire Yeomanry. That's when he started banging on the door, and soon he was in the street.

The German cannon fire had faded to the southeast and the rain swept in from the Mediterranean in sheets. But it didn't dampen the welcome.

Dusty, begrimed and with broad grins on their faces, the Hussars and the Yeomanry received the frantic cheers of the people of Tunis. These were the first friendly soldiers Tunis had seen in six months.

The only Germans seen were those begging to be taken prisoner.

Frenchmen shook hands and embraced each other.

There was one common cry:

"The English! The English!"

The Germans had been gone more than two hours when the first British troops rolled into Tunis. They fled the city shortly after one o'clock as British tanks converged on Tunis and there were a few brief brushes with the Nazis.

Six large fires and several smaller ones burned fiercely down towards the harbor. A pall of gray smoke floated over the city.

There were scattered shots from parts of the city—but they were only scattered. Organized resistance had ceased in Tunis.

A Frenchman jumped on the running-board of a staff car singing the Marseillaise at the top of his voice.

One of the Sherman tanks sported a large French flag on a pole. Deliriously enthusiastic Frenchmen had placed it there.

Small groups of Germans stood by the side of the road asking to be taken prisoner. They all carried white flags. One group of six came up to a car where United Press Correspondent Edward W. Beattie, Jr., sat. They were considerably less embarrassed than Beattie when they surrendered to him.

"We stayed behind on purpose," one of the Germans said, "when the main body of our force left. We're not Nazis."

It turned out that one of them lived only a few yards from the apartment Beattie had when he was United Press correspondent in Berlin.

And then night came to Tunis.

Through the darkness British tanks rumbled down the white streets while the rain pelted in from the sea. Street after street they rolled down, mopping up isolated pockets of resistance and gathering in more Axis prisoners.

After six months under the German boot Tunis was free.

In the north, the American Second Corps entered Bizerte—just five minutes before the First Army entered Tunis.

In those five minutes the African campaign to all intents and purposes closed.

Only six months ago to the day, General Eisenhower had started the campaign. During those six months American soldiers had gone a long way. From fresh, green, untried troops they had developed into tough, hard fighting men, and had won high praise from the Tommies who were born to war.

The capture of Bizerte was a pushover. All that was left when darkness fell over the city on May 7 were a few scattered enemy units which were firing their last ammunition. They knew they were beaten.

As the Americans entered Bizerte, there was scattered fire from German 88-mm. guns, but at dusk American tanks with their 75's picked out the isolated pockets of resistance and cleaned them up. Von Arnim had pulled out most of his men and sent them south to Cape Bon where he planned a last stand—perhaps a Bataan.

## CHAPTER FORTY-NINE

THE sun spun golden mists over the little headquarters tent with its American flag fingering the breeze there in the field southeast of Ferryville where the corn stood yellow and tossing on this Sunday of May 9.

Out there on the peninsula east of Bizerte were 15,000 trapped German tank and infantry troops, still fighting but well knowing the end was near, no escape possible.

Major General Ernest E. Harmon, commander of the American First Armored Division, sat in his tent there in the wheat field calmly smoking a cigarette and studying the situation on the map spread out before him.

It was 9:30 A. M.

The major-general's aide stood in front of the tent looking out toward the peninsula where the time beat of war went on, dull thuds floating through the morning.

Down the winding little road came a car, churning up dust. A white flag attached to a long stick fluttered above the car. It was a German car and the three men in it were Germans.

The car turned off the road and headed across the field toward the headquarters tent. It rolled up and stopped. A freshly shaven staff officer, wearing an Iron Cross at his throat, stepped out and saluted stiffly.

The staff officer sputtered something in German. The aide called the major-general's interpreter, Lieutenant Benne Selcke of Petersburg, Illinois.

"Your commanding officer, please," said the German.

The aide showed him into Major General Harmon's tent.

Again the German saluted. He stood stiffly as he spoke.

"What are your terms for surrender?" he asked.

Harmon turned to Selcke. "Tell him," he said, "my terms are

unconditional surrender, no sabotage of German equipment and no attempt at evacuation by sea. We will kill all who try to get away. Make that clear."

The German officer listened, then bowed, saluted again and turned from the tent. With him went the general's chief of staff, a colonel, to relay the terms of surrender to Major General Fritz Krause, artillery officer commanding the Nazi sector facing the Americans, and Major General Willibald Borowietz, commanding officer of the 15th Nazi Armored Division.

They climbed into a jeep and set out from the command tent for the German headquarters on Djebel-el-Faoar on the peninsula east of Bizerte.

Just before the jeep reached the front lines, where men were fighting and dying this sunny Sabbath, the German staff officer turned to the colonel and said:

"I think we had better put up a white flag."

The colonel shook his head. "We can't do that," he said. "There's no truce and we can't fly a white flag until you have capitulated."

The German shrugged his shoulders and looked a little uncomfortable but he didn't say anything else.

The jeep passed through the front lines and into the area where the Germans were trapped but still holding on. It rolled up to Major General Borowietz's tent. The American colonel stepped out and was shown in to Borowietz, a little man whose chest was laden with military medals.

The colonel saluted. The major-general returned the salute and then they relaxed.

"I deliver the terms of the general," the colonel said. "They are unconditional surrender. As soon as they are accepted there will be no further destruction of vehicles and no attempt to evacuate your troops by sea.

"The rules of international law prevail at the moment the terms are accepted. If you accept, present yourself with your staff officers to the general at noon."

Borowietz nodded his head. The colonel turned and walked from the tent with the German staff officer. They climbed into the jeep again and headed for the tent of Major General Krause where the colonel made a similar declaration.

Exactly at noon a stream of German staff cars pulled in at the American command post.

Borowietz and Krause were the first out of the cars. They looked unhappy. There was a trace of tears in their blue eyes and their lips twitched.

Borowietz broke down and cried like a baby. Here he stood before the American general whose armored division had battered his prize panzer legion to pieces, broken its back and broken his heart. He must have decided it was better to surrender than to attempt an escape, for Hitler has no use for men who fail.

"I am a general without a command in truth," said General Borowietz. "I have seen my panzers split in two and my panzers wiped out. I have no panzers, no artillery, not even a grenadier."

He wiped a tear from his face.

"This is a gentleman's war in North Tunisia," he said. "The Americans have fought like sportsmen."

General Borowietz regained some of his poise.

"The United States made its biggest mistake when it joined in with Russia," he declared. "The Fuehrer desired to have the English on his side. You Americans will soon learn this terrible mistake you made. America will lose because the Germans are winning in Russia."

But he admitted, after a mild argument, that he didn't know what was happening in Russia.

General Krause, tall, distinguished and scholarly looking in a wrinkled field-gray uniform and wearing neither cap nor helmet, accepted General Harmon's terms. He took the defeat in good grace and chatted gravely with the American officers.

Four other generals surrendered with Borowietz and Krause. They were Major General von Vaerst of the Panzers; Major

General Neuffer of a Luftwaffe Flak Division; Lieutenant General Buelouvis, commanding the Manteuffel Division, and Major General Baumsenge, commander of the Luftwaffe at Bizerte.

General Harmon invited the German officers to lunch and they ate sparingly from plates of steak, potatoes and spinach served from a field kitchen truck under a camouflage net.

Adolf Hitler had been unable to stop the surrender of his generals and tens of thousands of his crack African troops. But he had tried, tried with the only weapon he knew—fear and threats.

Into Allied hands fell a revealing document. It was addressed to German battalion commanders and had specified, "Destroy This After Reading." But somebody had been careless and had left the document lying about.

It promised only punishment for families at home of German soldiers who surrendered and for the soldiers severest penalties after the war.

"The names of those who have surrendered to the British and Americans are already established," the document said. "Proceedings will be instigated against them as soon as they come into German control again. Insofar as they are prisoners of war, the consequences of this infamy will be visited upon their relatives.

"German battalion commanders in Tunisia are ordered to keep strict watch on their men.

"Our soldiers do not deserve to be led by weaklings. Nearly all the criminals who have laid down their arms are those who have spent the entire war in replacement depots and now, in these critical times, have proved to be unworthy of battle.

"The Fuehrer will put into your hands, here in Africa, exactly as he has done on the Eastern front, all the means necessary to win.

"Commanders in the field are therefore ordered to give full consideration to this problem, without weakness or fear.

"We have no need to tremble before the enemy."

Perhaps Borowietz and Krause and the other German generals felt that it was better to surrender than to go home in disgrace.

Their surrender heralded the collapse of the German armies in Africa.

Only a few more seconds as time is measured in eternity remained for the complete fall of the continent that Hitler and Mussolini dreamed of holding under their conquests.

Out there on the hilly, thumb-shaped peninsula known as Cape Bon the end was in sight.

Americans and British soldiers would not be denied.

## CHAPTER FIFTY

THERE was no road back for the Axis this time.

The British Navy and the Allied air force prevented a Dunkirk. And the Axis troops didn't seem to have the courage or the heart to make a last-bullet stand as MacArthur's troops had done on Bataan.

Throughout the night of May 9 and daylong May 10 hundreds of Germans and Italians tried to escape from the shores of Tunisia in any small craft they could lay their hands on.

Scores of them were drowned along the fringe of Cape Bon, others were killed by Allied bombs and bullets, and the remainder were taken prisoner.

There was no escape by sea. Forty-five ships were sunk in the Sicilian Channel in three days and hour by hour more were going to the bottom. Over the waters around Cape Bon destroyers and small coastal craft of the British Navy kept watch, while in the air Allied fighters and fighter-bombers maintained an unceasing patrol that netted them hundreds of targets.

The seas were strewn with rafts and scores of disabled and

burning small boats. Men clung grimly to the rafts, waved pieces of white cloth when planes came over or naval vessels appeared.

"It's a Dunkirk in reverse," said a British pilot coming into a field to refuel and go back to where the hunting was good.

The position of the Axis troops was desperate. A few might be able to sneak out at night by plane or by boat, but no large units could get away.

Not only were the boats and the beaches being bombed, but all along the roads leading to the shore Allied fighters strafed every vehicle they could see. Scores were left wrecked and burning.

All the boats seemed to carry white flags of some description. Many boatloads of Axis soldiers surrendered to Allied planes flying overhead, and turned the noses of their little boats back to shore.

One German barge filled with troops, ammunition and oil was caught thirty miles east of Cape Bon, and a ship lying in the Rasidda anchorage on the east side of the peninsula was torpedoed and blown up.

What airfields the Germans had left on Cape Bon were being blasted off the face of the earth. French airmen swooped down on one field and destroyed thirty planes.

There was absolutely no Axis air activity in daylight. Allied fighters rode the skies completely unchallenged except by anti-aircraft fire.

British soldiers who had turned one of history's great military tragedies into an epic of courage at Dunkirk three years ago watched in bewilderment during May 11 as the vaunted Axis army fell apart before their eyes.

"They had plenty of guns. They could make a helluva fight, but they're just packing up—nobody knows why," said a British major who wanted revenge for the relentless hammering he took on the Dunkirk beach.

"They're folding before they're even hit on Cape Bon peninsula."

The major pulled off his helmet, rubbed his chin thoughtfully and watched Germans and Italians surrendering to anybody in uniform who would take them; watched them come out of the fields with their hands up and waving a white flag; watched them among the litter of abandoned rifles, revolvers, clothing, ammunition, tinned food and vehicles.

He must have been thinking about another day of retreat that he had seen from an opposite angle when the British Army in France was pinned back against the beach at Dunkirk but fought on with rifles and tommy guns against the relentless pounding of Nazi planes and artillery—until 330,000 were rescued to guard Britain against invasion.

"In France," he said quietly, "it was nothing like this. Our men fought every yard of the way back and they had none of these things to fight with."

Overhead American and British airplanes roared along the peninsula. There were big fires in the distance started by bombing or set by the Germans to destroy equipment.

"The difference here," said the major, "is that they don't have the Luftwaffe. But they've got everything else for fighting. They've got good positions and millions of mines. They just aren't doing anything about it."

He was wrong in one respect. They were doing something—they were surrendering as rapidly as possible.

Axis soldiers without escort flowed in a ninety-mile procession toward Allied prison pens from Cape Bon to Medjez-el-Bab, thirty-four miles southwest of Tunis.

One Nazi from a Panzer unit had learned what it was like to be on the other side in Greece and Yugoslavia. He complained bitterly that he had been fighting tanks with a rifle. He waved his hands despairingly over his head.

Remnants of the famed Hermann Goering Division in the hills cut loose with a sudden terrific artillery barrage—and then just as suddenly and for no known reason walked out to the dust road with their hands in the air.

Presumably they had merely shot their remaining ammunition instead of destroying it.

In a farmyard which had been an Italian service corps workshop stood an Italian medical officer and four orderlies at a tiny medical post. They had been abandoned by their comrades because their equipment was too bulky.

The tall, handsome young doctor was friendly. He looked at the tabs on my uniform.

"You report for the United Press?" he asked. "I used to read the United Press in Rome newspapers before the war. Can you arrange some transport for us?"

Everywhere the prisoners were streaming in behind the British armored spearheads that kept punching whatever resistance they could find. There were wild scenes when prisoners from one area met lines of prisoners from another at Nebeul Junction. They shouted and laughed, tossing candy from one truck to another.

Scenes at the Axis encampment left little doubt that the troops on the Cape Bon Peninsula had fled in panic in many instances. There were half opened food tins on the ground. Marmalade and sugar and coffee were spilled around. Uniforms, shirts, socks, boots, helmets and rifles were scattered everywhere.

Some rifles were broken. Many Axis soldiers had broken theirs as a gesture of non-resistance when they offered to surrender to armored units.

Some Nazis were still arrogant. They complained bitterly when the British assigned only four or five soldiers to guard five hundred German prisoners until transport arrived.

It was a wild fantastic day. British officers, thrusting forward rapidly, merely told hundreds of prisoners to drive their own trucks to prison cages—and their orders were obeyed.

I saw more German trucks in a few hours than I had seen in six months in Africa. Every one was crammed with prisoners. There were hundreds of them and most of them were driven by

Germans or Italians. They went back and forth, carrying their own men to the prison cages.

As I drove along a smooth highway in a sand-colored desert staff car, three British soldiers suddenly jumped on the running board brandishing revolvers. They said they thought my car was a German officer's car trying to get to Cape Bon. One guided me through the British armored units ahead so we would not be shot at.

"More Germans?" the British tankmen shouted as we approached.

"No, just a correspondent," my escort laughed.

Fifteen hours before this was a front. Now it was a chaos. The Axis army had just come to pieces in the hands of the British First Army.

Nobody there had ever seen anything like it. The First Army had so many prisoners it didn't know what to do with them.

British armored cars and tanks raced along the coastal roads, slashing through from side to side along the lateral peninsular roads.

Everywhere, the armored units fought for road space with the German and Italian trucks, filled with Germans and Italians hurrying happily back to be made prisoner as soon as the British could manage time to accept them.

By the end of the day Allied armor and air attacks had smashed all organized resistance by Axis armies isolated on Cape Bon Peninsula, boosted the toll of prisoners toward 100,000 and hammered furiously into the last core of enemy resistance in Africa in the mountains east of Zaghuan.

The British broke through at the base of Cape Bon to Hammamet and split the remaining Axis forces after a daring flanking maneuver in which the British Sixth Armored Division, veterans of the Tunisian battle, dashed through the waves along the beach in order to knock out the enemy defense positions at Hammamet Lif.

The tanks kicked up waves like a steamboat as they circled through the water and then charged ashore again to storm the enemy from behind.

For a time it had seemed that the British had been checked east of Hammamet Lif, where the Germans were putting up bitter resistance in the mountains commanding the road.

Then the tanks of the Sixth Armored Division suddenly broke through and fanned down toward Grombalia, halfway to Hammamet. Immediately the First Armored Division tanks held up in Grombalia Pass as they tried to reach the town from the southwest found the going better.

By 2 P. M., the tanks of the Sixth Division had seized both Grombalia and Soliman, nine miles east of Hammamet Lif.

Then came the daring flanking maneuver that sealed off the enemy survivors in two tightly ringed pockets from which there was no escape.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-ONE

COLONEL-GENERAL JURGEN VON ARNIM stood cornered but arrogant in his headquarters which had been carved out of the side of a mountain eighteen miles west of Hammamet on thumb-shaped Cape Bon Peninsula.

Driven into the last Axis toe-hold in the mountains, pounded by Allied aerial fleets, surrounded by British armor and made helpless by the wholesale surrender of his troops, the Prussian commander-in-chief in Tunisia finally sat down and scribbled a message to Hitler, who had ordered him to fight to the bitter end.

"I report that the order to defend Tunisia to the last cartridge has been carried out," the message said.

Von Arnim's radio operator apparently failed to agree with his message. He added, apparently on his own initiative, a message to the homeland:

"Everything has been destroyed. We are closing down forever."

Von Arnim scribbled a few words on a page in his diary. The date was May 12. A day he would remember as long as he lived.

And then he sent a message to General K. A. N. Anderson, the brilliant, hard-hitting commander of the British First Army. It consisted of one word:

"Terms?"

"Unconditional surrender!" the Scot replied.

"Also," messaged Anderson, "the handing over of all weapons and plans for mine fields and assistance in sweeping the mine fields."

The terms were delivered to Von Arnim as he stood haughtily in his headquarters, which patrols of the Fourth Indian Division had already found.

Von Arnim's face turned purple as he read Anderson's message. His big right fist hammered at the palm of his left hand. The Iron Cross over his heart trembled as his body shook in anger.

"I refuse to sign such terms," he shouted. "Never! Never!"

Back went the word to Anderson that Von Arnim had bitterly refused to accept his demand for "unconditional surrender."

Calm and unperturbed, General Anderson quietly ordered an armored patrol of the Fourth Indian Division to bring Von Arnim in.

"Pick him up," Anderson ordered, "and bring him to headquarters. We'll try to persuade him that any further resistance by his forces is futile."

Von Arnim's soldiers had sometime before realized the futility on their own and continued to stream into Allied barbed wire prisoner cages. They were bedraggled and dust-covered and many were taken to the prison camps without guards in their own trucks by their own drivers.

While Von Arnim carried on with his arrogant air, troops which had good positions, guns and ammunition gave up.

The Indian patrol found Von Arnim in his headquarters. He was just standing there, haughty and glaring. He made no attempt to resist. He didn't even make a move for the pistol that hung at his belt. He got into an armored car and went with them to British headquarters.

Hitler had sacrificed Von Arnim for Nazi prestige.

And then General Sir Bernard Freyberg of the British Eighth Army's New Zealanders sent an ultimatum of unconditional surrender to Major General Graf von Sponeck, commander of the trapped German forces below Cape Bon.

"I'll fight to the last," Von Sponeck replied.

But shortly thereafter his men were observed firing into the air in token that they realized the hopelessness of their situation.

Finally, Von Sponeck broke and accepted Freyberg's terms.

Thus, the last German forces in Tunisia surrendered. But not the Italians. Remnants of a small force continued to make a hopeless stand in a small pocket under the command of General Giovanni Messe, who technically was in charge of all Axis troops in Africa but who had had to play second fiddle to Von Arnim.

When General Messe was called on to surrender he refused.

Allied officers evinced pleasure that the troops holding out to the last, after the Germans had crumbled shamelessly, should be an Italian general and Italian soldiers at whom the Germans had sneered.

General Messe held out until May 13 and then he said he would surrender but he made it clear he would give himself up only to the Eighth Army.

There was nothing humiliating or heroic in Messe's surrender: it was merely matter of fact.

He surrendered to a British divisional general in a clearing dotted with poppies—but the poppies were the only trimmings.

Since Messe requested surrendering to the Eighth Army, a rendezvous was agreed upon a few miles south of Enfidaville although it was not enemy territory.

The British general merely drove up, brusksly told the inter-

preter to tell Messe to leave his car and enter his staff car. There was not even a salute, and it was all over in two minutes.

Messe arrived first, and he sat brooding in a corner of his car waiting, heavy and stern.

He had tried standing up in his car and saluting as his captured countrymen marched past, but soon got tired and sat down again and let the endless stream of Italian soldiers go on their way without a nod of recognition.

Once he had entered the British general's car they moved off down the road toward Tania, joining a long string of cars and lorries moving south.

This was the end in Tunisia.

The official records, however, will say that all organized resistance ceased in Tunisia at 8:15 P. M., May 12.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-TWO

THE Germans swear they held to the last bullet. They want the world to believe they didn't pack up and call it quits until the last shell had been fired and there were only guns and rifles left—but no ammunition.

That is a farce and a falsehood; the Americans took one dump of twelve thousand tons of munitions intact.

The story behind the German crack-up before Tunis and Bizerte is a story of clever tactics and hard, thorough supply work that moved seventeen thousand tons of supplies a week.

What really happened was that Allied leaders just outsmarted Hitler's best.

There were three factors in the sudden collapse of the Axis armies in Tunisia.

In the first place, United States infantry did a job which would have done credit to any infantry in the world. It was Yank infantry that blazed a trail twenty miles through some of the roughest country in Tunisia and fought with a courage and a

brilliance that stand up with the best of all time. They took Hill 609 and started the general breakup of Axis positions. This was the move that sent the Germans reeling in the north and caused them to withdraw so fast they left their dead and wounded. This was when they started for Tunis and Cape Bon to make the last stand.

The second factor in the victory was the secret shift pulled by armored and infantry units of the Eighth Army who left their sector on the southeastern end of the line and moved into Medjerda Valley—the approach to Tunis. This was the First Army's toughest sector. The First and Eighth Army units broke through to the Tunis plains and there was no stopping them.

The third factor was an air assault in cooperation with ground troops. It probably was one of the most devastating that had ever been carried out on any battle front. The Allies sent over hundreds of planes and riddled the Axis ground forces. They just blasted a path in advance of Allied ground units.

It wasn't that the Allies had more men than the Axis. It was just that they knew their job. It had taken the Americans some time to get the hang of war but once they did there was no stopping them.

But what the Allies did have was air superiority. In the final stages of the campaign the sky was practically deserted of Axis planes.

The Germans and Italians lost the battle of Tunisia in a half dozen catastrophic days because they had been cut to ribbons and forced to abandon their most precious equipment—their artillery. They were thrown into hopeless confusion in the hills before Tunis by opponents who were better than they were.

The job the American and British staffs did in turning a campaign that had been one of bitter disappointment into one of brilliant victory may turn out to be a model for campaigns to come.

In November when American and British troops landed in Africa, a skeleton army raced into Tunisia and drove towards

Tunis along two roads. They were thrown back but they managed to hold a key position at Medjez-el-Bab, with sometimes nothing but tanks to hold the front lines. That's the kind of shape they were in.

Then came the heart-breaking period during the winter when the Allied armies were strung out so thinly that often there were great open spaces patrolled only by such units as British paratroops and ill-equipped French formations.

It can now be revealed that during those days, neither the British nor the Americans had enough men to do a good job of either offense or defense.

Then came the period of gathering strength. For the first time British and Americans began outstripping the Germans in reinforcements and gradually thickened their lines until the Germans could not hope for a break-through of more than temporary importance.

For the first time, during the break-through at Fondouk on March 29, British and Americans cooperated at full divisional strength.

Supply was the biggest problem, but the Allies whipped that. It meant the difference between losing and winning.

The Axis lost well over 600,000 men in killed, wounded and captured, at least 1,000 guns and 250 tanks.

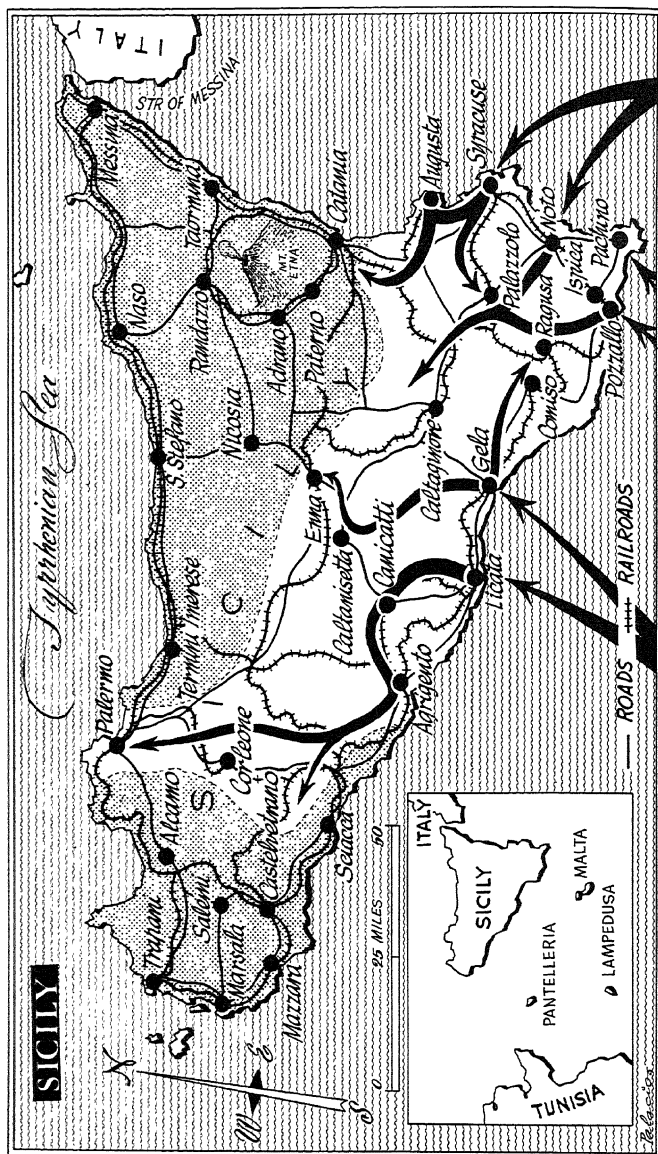
The campaign from the shipping point of view cost the Allies little. Over 11,000,000 gross tons of Allied merchant shipping carrying supplies and men from the United States and Britain entered North African ports during the campaign—between November 8 and May 8. Of this huge total the Allies lost only 2.16 per cent from enemy action.



PART X

*HEEL OF ACHILLES*

*By Ned Russell*  
*John Parris*



## CHAPTER FIFTY-THREE

THE importance of the final Allied victory in the Tunisian "tip" was not so much the fact that American and British forces seized Tunis and Bizerte and captured some two hundred and twenty-four thousand troops in less than two weeks. That was planned carefully, deliberately, down to the last foreseeable contingency. The plans were carried out with forces in such overwhelming strength that their success never could be in doubt. The only possible hitch was that the timetable of battles, as one merged into another through the hills buttressing Bizerte and guarding Cape Bon Peninsula, might be thrown out of gear by bad luck, or might occasion disastrous mistakes. There was no particular reason to think no mistakes would be made. So many had been made before by both British and American troops and commanders.

Only one factor was overlooked. I don't believe anyone from Eisenhower and Alexander down to their most subordinate commanders realized the delicacy of the German machinery of control, and how once it was destroyed, their whole organization would collapse into rubble and chaos. But there was no reason to anticipate such a complete crackup of what had been recognized for more than three years as the finest military machine the world had ever seen. It had never happened before, and the obvious Axis strategy as Von Arnim faced ultimate certain defeat was to hold out as long as possible—two months might have been enough—in the hope that a long expensive struggle for victory in Africa might prevent the Allies from invading southern Europe during 1943.

But what happened? The timetable worked out so carefully to meet any foreseeable eventuality was thrown completely out of

whack by the astonishing speed with which the opening blows blasted their way through positions which Von Arnim thought would take days or weeks to break down, but instead they were overrun in a matter of hours. And then as an intricate tightening up of the timetable became necessary to meet new situations the Allied troops functioned with perfect precision and coordination. The Axis troops were stunned, bewildered and helpless, because their leaders, even Von Arnim, were just as stunned, just as bewildered, and just as helpless to do anything to stave off this great flood of power. The flood broke through strong frontline defenses and swept on, fanning out always and crushing resistance almost before it could be organized by commanders on the spot. It shattered Von Arnim's intricate network of communications, and left him helpless to coordinate his forces for a last stand. In the final stages he couldn't even contact his divisional commanders by radio to tell them to quit.

To people all over the world this fall of Tunis and Bizerte, I'm certain, symbolized the end of the North African campaign. For the Americans it was all over except scooping up some remnants of Germans and a few Italians who were holding out in little clusters up in the hills or trying to surrender. Most important for the Americans, their victory meant they had shown themselves finally to be equal to any troops on the Allied side—and certainly masters of the Germans who had mauled and beaten them for most of the previous six months. The American Second Corps had grown up from a state of "military adolescence" into a hard, battlewise machine of first-class fighting men. Men who had begun the campaign with a cock-sure know-it-all attitude had learned with a good deal of death and suffering that war is nothing like the maneuvers in which they engaged at home.

After they had been pushed around in the early months of the campaign, particularly at Kasserine Pass, they had slumped into an inferiority complex—a feeling of uncertainty. The British at that time were better soldiers than they were—because they knew more about war. Most British units even included men

who had served in France, although their actual battle experience might have been limited to the last three-week retreat.

The big change came over the Americans when the Thirty-fourth Division, vowing it would make no more blunders, stormed Hill 609. Word spread through American lines. "We've got these guys on the run—let's get the bastards." They did; the victory of General Ryder's men was just what all Americans with the possible exception of General Terry Allen's First Infantry Division needed. When final victory had been won and prisoners were streaming in even faster than could be handled, Americans had thrown off their inferiority complex. "We've got 'em once and we can do it again," they said, and then they usually asked whether anyone around knew if they would be used in invading southern Europe.

This sudden fantastic end to the campaign which probably never would have been fought at all if France had not collapsed in June nineteen forty, altered the whole layout of Allied strategy. It presented in clear glaring light the clue to the defeat of the German armies: that is, they are helpless without their central control. It was the first time the Allies had really whipped the Germans decisively and completely. Even the Eighth Army had never been able to do that. Montgomery and his soldiers had chased Rommel's forces nearly two thousand miles but they hadn't done what they had tried to do every mile of the way—annihilate them.

The Eighth Army had proved itself to be the best desert army in the world, but it didn't have enough mountain fighting experience to retain its superiority when it got out of the vast flat battleground of the desert.

The greatest and most noticeable change which came over any Allied forces in the closing stages of the campaign was the sharp transformation the Americans had experienced, and they came out a hardened army which could demand respect of any soldier in the world. Those Americans, officers as well as enlisted men, had looked on war six months before as something remote which

production in their factories at home would win. They hadn't appreciated the discomforts and hardships which are part of war. But in that last week they fought and lived on two or three hours' sleep a day or night, and even those brief snatches of rest had to be taken with the deafening din of German artillery and mortar fire roaring around them constantly. They knew that at that time the Germans were fighting harder than at any time in the campaign. Afterwards they learned with a good deal of pride that they had whipped Germans who had been ordered to fight it out to the last round of ammunition.

During that last week German bombers tried to kill them at night in their trenches and foxholes, after German guns had tried all day to kill them. The one thing they did know when it was all over was that their American artillery, including the giant "Long Toms" which can reach out and pound the enemy fifteen miles away, was the best in the world. Even the Germans admitted that. During one American artillery barrage the Germans on the receiving end cringed in their holes for forty-eight hours and admitted it. During this fierce week-long struggle Americans lived on their cold rations without cigarettes and with only one pint of water per day per man for washing as well as for drinking.

The battle was too wild and bloody to take time off to organize sanitation facilities. There wasn't even time to bury their dead properly or dispose of dead horses, mules and cattle. In a way that was good for them. It was experience which they had not had before on such a big scale but which they undoubtedly will have again. And next time they have to endure it, they will take it with even less grumbling and fewer complaints than during that week.

Many lessons which Americans learned at Tunis were also learned by the British. Americans got a great deal of criticism and British got a great deal of praise in the early months of the campaign. Most discussion relative to the merits of the two armies I think was justified. Perhaps the phrase "discussion relative to the merits" is the more accurate way of describing

comments about Americans than the word "criticisms." I don't think it's fair to blame or "criticize" soldiers for being "green" or comparatively ill-trained or because they lack sufficient equipment to fight as efficiently as the enemy who has had more war experience and who has more fighting equipment than anyone else. That's not the fault of the soldiers who are being "criticized" or "discussed." The fault lies much deeper and involves much broader questions.

There was one criticism which I heard many times about Americans which I think justified. In the beginning of the campaign they were reluctant to accept advice from the British who had much more experience and practical knowledge. Time and again British officers whom I know well enough to discuss these things frankly openly told me, "Your people just won't take advice. We have tried to help them, but they want to do it their own way." Perhaps that's "the American way"—to learn the hard way by one's own experience—but I hate to think of the number of American boys who have been killed or wounded because they "wanted to do it their own way first."

I think the basis for that criticism goes back to the American army training camps in the United States, and to a system that apparently was unable to disseminate lessons that might be learned from the reports of American Army observers in Britain and the Middle East before the United States became actively involved in the war in Europe. I know the lessons that were reported to Washington, but they seem to have been lost there. For example, in the early days I met several American tank crews who were amazed by the accuracy and efficiency of the 88-millimeter gun. In June, 1942 the Eighth Army lost more than two hundred tanks in one day to 88-millimeter guns at Sidi Razegh. From then on every British soldier knew an "eight-eight" was probably the best and the deadliest weapon in the German army. And Washington knew it, too.

In "discussions" about American troops which I had with American troops themselves and with American correspondents

covering them more closely than I, I often heard they were subject to a certain degree of "panic" or "fright" when they were caught in tight places. Small units were apt to "break" under difficult circumstances, or if they got lost in a mountain wilderness and suddenly bumped into an enemy outpost. Some of them lacked individual resourcefulness and initiative, particularly younger officers. This was due clearly to inability of small-unit commanders to keep their men under control, and that in turn was due to the fact that the American Army was created in the United States in a single great mass and trained in the same way.

War had come to the United States so quickly, and the need to get troops into the field was so urgent, that there was no time to apply proper concentration to training small units and their officers.

Training was on a divisional scale rather than on a platoon scale. But I feel certain that it was unavoidable under the circumstances immediately following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It was just unfortunate it had to be done that way.

The question of the standard of the officers was one which I found caused American enlisted men considerable anxiety and discomfort. The system of selecting officers apparently had been too lax. Men who couldn't carry heavy responsibilities and who couldn't command the respect of the men under their leadership became officers while other men who were better qualified but who got lost in the shuffle remained in the ranks. Again I think that this was due to a mass-created army and the natural lack of cohesion in the early days. The British went through the same difficulties but long before the African campaign. And as a result, the First Army did not suffer so much from the effects of poor leadership among junior officers.

One difficulty with the younger American officers was their tendency to give orders in a sort of "Come on fellows, let's do this" style. That works all right on the football field or baseball diamond but doesn't work on the battlefield. Also the officers

were not strict enough in their enforcement of military discipline. There was too much argument between officers and enlisted men.

Another factor was a lack of fighting temperament. I don't mean by that that Americans were not brave and willing and eager to fight. They were. As a matter of fact, as in the case of most "green" troops, they sometimes were too brave and too willing to fight. I mean instead that war was a romantic sort of "cowboy" adventure to many of them in the early days. They weren't as tough physically or mentally as they tried to be. And they were apt to get overexcited when calm and orderliness were needed.

It was this temperament which I think responsible for another thing for which they were "criticized" legitimately. They were careless or reckless about the way they used some of their equipment. Their supreme faith in their weapons made them think every weapon they had, regardless of how its usefulness might be limited, could do anything they wanted it to do. For example, they tried to use light "honey" tanks and half-tracks for fighting superior numbers of German tanks. Both "honey" tank and half-track were designed as fast reconnaissance vehicles, for which they are perfectly suited—but they are not intended as offensive weapons in tank battles. Their armament is not heavy enough.

I mention these criticisms and discussions mainly because most of them have been overcome. I might not have appreciated some of them when they first came out. It's much easier to criticize in retrospect. But the important thing is that those "mistakes" and "growing pains" will not have to be suffered again, I'm sure.

The British didn't have quite so many of these difficulties in North Africa. They had them in France and in the first couple of years of fighting in the Western desert. One of the most important traditions in the Eighth Army—and the lack of which undoubtedly did much to soften the American Army—is strict military discipline. In contrast to the American doughboy, the

British Tommy goes into the army prepared "to be led." From the day he first puts on a uniform the idea is driven into him that he must do as he is ordered, regardless of whether he thinks the order is right or wrong. And the British soldier learns quickly to accept that doctrine. To the American soldier the idea that someone can boss him around is repugnant, while the principle of discipline is contrary to his upbringing and his history. That, I think, is one reason why General Eisenhower ordered a general tightening up of discipline throughout the American forces in Africa.

The First British Army suffered from two principal defects in the beginning—comparatively poor equipment (particularly the distribution of it), and poor leadership among the senior officers. The Crusader and Valentine tanks with which the Sixth Armored Division came to Africa were no match for the German tanks. They could scarcely get within range of them. The American medium Sherman tanks were the best tanks they had, and they didn't even have any of their own British Churchill tanks, which developed into first-class weapons. Their infantry didn't have enough machine guns, especially heavy machine guns, and their mortars were so puny they rarely could even reach the Germans with them.

British leadership in the field was, I think, a very provocative subject of argument. In the beginning there seemed to be a certain recklessness in attacking with forces which were too small to succeed. I often discussed this with British officers at the time, and they always argued that the attacks, regardless of their results, were worthwhile because they gave the troops such valuable battle experience. I'm certain the troops themselves didn't appreciate this attitude, but I'm not certain that the idea wasn't right. Certainly the Seventy-eighth Division, which spent six months in line without rest and suffered very heavy casualties, came out as the finest fighting division in the First Army. But somehow I always found it difficult to agree with a policy or an attitude which sent companies to attack objectives where bat-

talions were needed, and battalions to attack objectives where brigades were needed.

The final argument in defense of these tactics was that the forces were not available to carry out bigger attacks. They were not on hand at the time, but I wondered whether some extra exertion by communications and supply organizations might not have remedied such an acute shortage of manpower sooner than they did. The problem of transport, which was really desperate, probably was the true answer to the whole problem.

But while these lessons and many more were being assimilated during six months of bitter fighting in Tunisia, the last two-week campaign pointed up weaknesses in the German army. They turned out to be weaknesses which obviously had been there all the time, but which no one—with the possible exception of the Russians—ever had been able to find and prove.

For example, the German soldier, unlike either the American or the British soldier of today, depends too much on the support of the Luftwaffe. To the German soldier loss of the Luftwaffe—and it was completely lost to him during the last days in Tunisia—was a major catastrophe. The German soldier was “spoiled” in Poland, Norway, the Low Countries, France and the Balkans, and in the last couple of years in Africa, by the fact that the Luftwaffe seemed to be unbeatable in the air, and he could call on it for help at any time. Coordination between the Luftwaffe and the Wehrmacht seemed to be perfect to the last degree. It was his artillery as well as his overhead protection. When it vanished, he found himself suddenly alone and helpless. I remember the German prisoner who deserted to the New Zealanders at the Enfidaville Line. He told his captors he had been in Russia under constant attack by the Red Air Force, and had asked his superiors where the Luftwaffe was. Finally, longing for relief from Russian air attacks, he volunteered for service in Africa, and went with the Afrika Korps into action at the Mareth Line. There he was bombed several times a day by the RAF and the USAAF. He asked again where the Luftwaffe was,

and was told it was in Russia. "I decided there wasn't any Luft-waffe," he told the New Zealanders, "and I made up my mind to desert."

As a fighting force, however, the Germans and Italians who surrendered in the last days to the British, American and French troops were still first-class soldiers in their physical makeup and their equipment. I saw tens of thousands of them driving their own trucks and cars into prisoners' pens which seemed to bulge more every hour. They were perfectly healthy; indeed many of them looked to be in better physical condition than their conquerors. The Germans, especially, were extremely fit. Their surrender could not be attributed to physical strain or hunger or thirst. They abandoned enormous food dumps. Although some units managed to destroy all or most of their equipment and supplies, there still remained great amounts of booty in the form of guns of all types, ammunition and transport. And even those units which did destroy their supplies and equipment could have held out for days or weeks with what they wrecked. So contrary to what the German propaganda services cried out to the world, the surrender could not be attributed to lack of ammunition or supplies.

The German soldiers with whom I talked in prisoners' pens and by the roadside were nonplussed by their own surrender. The Italians, as usual, seemed glad to be out of it. The Germans offered such explanations as, "Our leaders knew what was right and did it." But they couldn't explain why they thought surrender was right. When I pressed them for some elaboration of this, pointing out that surrender never had seemed right to them before, they insisted stubbornly that, "Our leaders knew best."

The answer obviously was: their leaders had lost control of the battle. The links from Von Arnim to his corps commanders, divisional commanders and other subordinate officers were snapped. And without that central control at the top, the whole machine stopped. It ceased to function. It had proved to be more brittle than anyone dared hope. And unlike either British or

American troops, German soldiers were helpless. They revealed a complete unwillingness even to attempt to fight in small units, or to wage guerrilla warfare. The latter would have been easy in the Tunisian mountains where many Arabs friendly to the Axis would certainly have made possible activity that might be compared to the guerrilla struggles which are being fought constantly in Europe. I can't recall ever hearing of German troops being cut off from their own units and roaming among Allied positions fighting independently and living "off the land." Their parachutists had been dropped behind Allied lines on specific missions and had effected sabotage, but those were only deeds of well-disciplined soldiers obeying orders, and carrying them out in the way they had been trained. All this seemed to prove that the ordinary German soldier—not necessarily a highly trained parachutist—is a good soldier only when he is in a big, strong force and is well led.

The battle in Africa had done and proven many things. It furnished the finest sort of "training ground" for British and American armies. Six months of hard, bitter fighting and living, coming on top of equally hard and bitter fighting for two and a half years in the Western desert had yielded a tough, battle-hardened, well-led, unified fighting force of American and British soldiers. Looking back on all those long struggles, I can see now it is much better that General Wavell's first campaign in Libya ended indecisively, and that General Anderson's desperate dash to Tunis last November failed. Had General Anderson's drive succeeded, prisoners and booty would have been infinitesimal. And the armies which were to be massed in Africa for the invasion of Southern Europe would be going into battle knowing nothing of what was facing them.

But today they know their enemy. They know all his tricks and weaknesses. They know how to whip him into mass submission.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-FOUR

A LITTLE group of British and American officers climbed to the top of one of the mountains on Cape Bon Peninsula and looked eastward toward a tiny speck of land lying in the Mediterranean.

There was a haze that made observation difficult but through powerful glasses they could make out an island. It was Pantelleria, Mussolini's Gibraltar.

The roar of hundreds of motors in the sky above shattered the peacefulness of the afternoon, and the men lifted their eyes and watched the big Flying Fortresses wing out to sea and to Pantelleria.

The Tunisian campaign had been over just ten days. American and British ground troops were resting before taking a leap from the springboard to the continent of Axis Europe. But there was no rest for the boys born to fly. A new and greater job was just beginning—the softening up of the Continent's first line of defenses.

The men who direct the strategy of the Allied forces had selected Pantelleria as the test case for prolonged, scientific and shattering bombing. Beat your enemy down from the air and then send your troops in when he's battered and bleeding and pleading. The casualties aren't so heavy then.

So the Forts roared out to Pantelleria that afternoon—the first of many afternoons and mornings to come.

For twenty days hell rained from the skies above Pantelleria. Twenty days of the most shattering bombing any people had ever witnessed. Twenty days of terror. Twenty days of cowering in caves.

Each day it grew worse. To the people of Pantelleria it seemed that the world was coming to an end. It got so bad the people of

Pantelleria couldn't venture from the caves. At night they came out for a breath of air, a smoke.

Twice the Allies asked the Italian garrison of 15,000 soldiers to surrender and twice Admiral Gino Pavesi refused. The refusals only increased the tempo of the attacks. Bombs cascaded down from dozens of planes, neutralized what little anti-aircraft defenses the Italians had, blew the Spadillo airfield to bits, smashed the island's one good harbor.

About all that was left was thirty-two square miles of volcanic rock.

In ten days American and British bombardiers dropped 7,000,000 pounds of bombs on the island. On June 9 the Allies dropped more bombs than had been dumped on Tunisia, Sicily, Sardinia and the Italian mainland during the entire month of April.

Soldiers and civilians alike on the island were terrified. It seemed they were doomed. There was no hope left and the island's precious water supply was exhausted. The 6,000 civilians had no food. For days they had been cut off from the mainland. Mussolini couldn't risk his ships in a sea he could no longer call his own.

Finally, Admiral Pavesi, red-eyed from lack of sleep, his nerves raw from the crump, crump that never ceased, sat down and scribbled a message. He handed it to a radio operator and told him to send it to the Allies.

A radio operator at an American air base in Tunisia perked up his ears. The message he picked up said:

"Beg surrender through lack of water."

As the message came in that morning of June 11, a fleet of British cruisers and destroyers stood offshore at Pantelleria. Allied planes were in the air over the island.

The British cruiser *Aurora* hovered offshore, waiting. Aboard her rode General Eisenhower and Admiral Sir Andrew Browne Cunningham.

British assault troops lined the decks of some of the ships. They had slept sweating below decks.

At 11:40 A. M. planes spotted a white cross on one of the island's airfields. Lookouts on the cruisers and destroyers spotted a white flag on the wrecked harbor installations.

Orders passed from ship to ship and then down the lines of British troops they carried.

"We're going ashore," the orders ran.

Tough British Tommies gripped tighter their guns. Some fingered their knives. But they really didn't expect much opposition.

At noon the landing barges were lowered.

Twenty-two minutes later the Tommies scrambled ashore behind a creeping artillery barrage from the warships while planes roared in the skies above.

A few Italian troops fired on the British. Apparently they had not been informed of the surrender.

But it didn't take the Tommies long to mop up these few.

The British troops were ordered to share their forty-eight-hour emergency rations and their two pints of water with the local inhabitants who had been without food and water for three days.

As the assault boats hit the beach Italians crawled from caves and cellars waving white flags, shirts, even their underwear.

The Tommies found Admiral Pavesi cowering in a cave in the hills, frightened, haggard. Most of his men were with him. They surrendered without lifting a rifle.

While the first 8,000 Italian troops were being rounded up, fifty German dive-bombers sneaking south from Sicily roared in over the island but Allied fighters tore into them and drove them off before they could cause any material damage.

When the troops climbed up into the hills to the airdrome, about three and a half miles from the harbor, they found a mass of craters. At least eighty-five planes were strewn along the edges of the field.

With Mussolini's "Gibraltar" outpost in British hands, Allied air attacks were switched to Lampedusa within ninety minutes after the first white flags appeared on the island of Pantelleria.

It is considered the fastest changeover of any tactical maneuver ever carried out by any air force.

Without warning, Lampedusa was deluged with bombs. There was no rising crescendo like Pantelleria. It came full force, no build-up this time.

As the attack started, the Allies called on the garrison to surrender in order to avoid unnecessary loss of life.

The Italian authorities debated and while they debated the bombs continued to cascade from the skies. They made up their minds just twenty-four hours after the first bomb fell. The decision was to surrender.

The white flag of surrender was first seen from the air in mid-afternoon of June 12.

The British Navy, however, didn't see any flags and remained at its points at sea off the island until 6:29 P. M.

An Allied officer went ashore in a small boat at 7 P. M. and personally dictated the surrender terms to the senior officer of the island who accepted them.

The occupation of the island was immediately started. Within a few hours Allied troops were standing guard on the island. Mussolini had lost his "unsinkable aircraft carrier."

Linosa, another of the Italian islands in the Sicilian Narrows, didn't wait for a taste of the blows which hammered Pantelleria and Lampedusa into subjection.

A British destroyer appeared off the island at dawn on June 13. The Italians hoisted a white flag almost immediately.

A British landing party went ashore and rounded up a hundred and forty soldiers and sailors and evacuated them from Italy's last toe-hold in the Narrows.

And then Lampione, which is little more than a hump of sand breaking the Mediterranean, joined the parade.

Ahead lay Sicily, Sardinia, Crete, eventually Italy, the Balkans.

Mussolini was shaking in his patent-leather boots.

## CHAPTER FIFTY-FIVE

THE moon spilled its white light over the crest of the Tunisian hill where Ike Eisenhower stood with slanted arm as a giant Allied armada roared north in endless numbers across the Mediterranean toward a triangular island as old as the hills.

Ike Eisenhower gave the seven old coins he carried in his pocket a rub for good luck. Among the coins was an old English five-guinea piece. Eisenhower rubbed them several times—just to make sure.

Out there in the Mediterranean were forty solid nautical miles of Allied ships moving north upon the island Garibaldi had taken for Italy's own in the last century. They carried American, British, Canadian and French troops. Ike Eisenhower reckoned they would be needing all the luck he could conjure up. They were headed for Sicily.

This was the beginning of the liberation of Europe—the beginning of the end.

The wind blew hard. It riled the Mediterranean. Waves lashed at the ships of the Allied invasion fleet. For a time it looked as though the expedition might be forced to turn back. But the fleet of more than two thousand craft kept to its course, moved onward, never slackened speed.

And then word came through that the operation would continue according to plan. This was to be the biggest combined operation the world had ever seen. The wind died to a breeze and the angry waters calmed. Some said that a miracle had come to pass, as when there was a great calm at Dunkirk.

A group of Canadian officers, some who had gone to Dieppe and others who had waited two long monotonous years for a crack at the Nazis, met in the lounge of one of the ships.

"We are on the eve of a night in the history of the world that will never be forgotten," said a bronzed, tough colonel. "We will look back on this night, and our children will."

There was a moment of suspended silence. In that moment the eternal swish of water against the ship and the forever-creaking that cries out day and night in every vessel that travels upon the seas, seemed to pause. No word was spoken but the men acted as one. They removed their caps and repeated the Lord's Prayer. "*Our Father, which art in Heaven . . .*"

Other men in other ships and in the close, cramped quarters of the invasion barges prayed too, silently, to themselves. "*. . . And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil.*"

Ahead lay Sicily and the evil that Hitler and Mussolini had turned loose upon a world at peace.

"*For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory for ever. Amen.*"

The little group of Canadian officers shook hands all around and then wandered out on the decks.

Through the mess of one of the invasion transports moved a boy in khaki placing menus on the table for a predawn breakfast.

Across the top of the menu were the words: "Special Breakfast for Sicilian Tourists." It read:

Stewed Fruit of the Island  
Oats Rolled  
Fresh Fish Knocked Unconscious by Lowering First  
Landing Craft  
Grilled Breakfast Bacon  
Fried Eggs

*(Next issue from Café Royal, Palermo)*

*To order:* Marsala wine, Pistachio nuts, and Il Duce.

*(Keep your feet dry.)*

The toiling little jeeps dragged gliders into position on North African airfields, and tough British glider troops climbed in.

"Gor blimey," a Cockney said, "this toime is the one. Oi reckon we've got a big surprise in store for old Musso."

The big guy from Yorkshire nodded.

The red-faced Scot wasn't saying anything. He was digging into a jar of candy with his commando knife.

Casually, it seemed, these men in claret berets, khaki drill jackets and shorts, gathered about the lines of gliders and planes. They stood around wisecracking and talking about the nice cup of tea they would "knock back" toward the end of the journey ahead of them.

"Rather like a picnic party to look at 'em," somebody said.

But these men and their machines were due for their greatest adventure of the war. It was Friday night about eight o'clock. Two hundred miles beyond the dusk lay Sicily—their objective.

This was to be the first use of gliders and glider troops in the Allies' war against the Axis.

The tow rope between plane and glider was taut now. There was a roar of motors, and the plane and glider rolled down the runway and lifted gracefully into the air. Others followed, until the sky was black. There were many planes, fewer motors.

They roared and glided north across the Mediterranean, passed over the invasion fleet somewhere beyond Malta.

Somewhere over the first tier of foothills beyond the soft southern coast of Sicily intercoms went to work between plane and glider. "Hullo glider, hullo glider. Tug calling. We are approaching the dropping zone." Silence. Then: "Hullo glider, hullo glider. You can detach now. You can detach now."

The Scot screwed the top on his jar of candy and placed it in his knapsack. He put away his commando knife. He felt for his tommy gun. It was there all right.

In a couple of minutes they were going to be on their own—motorless planes hunting a place to light.

One by one silently with only a slight rush of wind against

their wings the gliders dropped off into the silence of the night.

The glider-carrying planes headed for home.

The first glider swooped in like a giant eagle and cracked into the rugged terrain. The sides fell away and the glider troops scrambled out.

It was 10:10 P. M. Friday, July ninth.

The first British troops had landed on Sicily.

The invasion of Europe had started.

This was old stuff to the American paratroopers huddled in the Forty-sevens hurtling across the Sicilian coast. They had done a lot of jumping since they dropped out of the skies over North Africa that November morning nine months ago.

Their hands were not cold and moist now. And their throats were not dry as they waited. They sat there chewing gum and grinning as the flak, hopelessly inaccurate, came up at them.

These were Colonel Edison Raff's boys—Uncle Sam's toughest birds.

And the little guy from Georgia, Sergeant Joe Moore, and his Pennsylvania sidekick, Private Joseph Moffo Junior, could see their dream taking shape. They were on the right road now. Maybe they would get to drop in on Hitler and Mussolini after all. Sicily was in the right direction.

A light flashed in each cabin of the big Forty-sevens.

The paratroopers got to their feet.

Same old stuff—just a new country.

"Geronimo," yelled the first paratrooper in line. He went out the door and down.

"San Antone," yelled another.

It was 11:20 P. M.

The Americans were in.

In the early hours of July tenth invasion barges darted toward the southeastern shores of Sicily. Allied warships that stood out to sea hurled shells over them and smashed the Italian coast

defense points. The American Seventh Army headed for the Gela beaches, turning northwest from the convoy. The British and Canadian invasion fleets went straight ahead.

Planes roared through the darkness bombing and strafing.

At 2:45 P. M., two hours and thirty-five minutes after the first airborne troops landed, a Canadian soldier leaped from a landing barge and scrambled ashore.

The land operations were officially under way.

It was 10:00 P. M. in Washington.

At the White House a dinner for General Giraud was being given.

An aide handed President Roosevelt a slip of paper.

The President rose to his feet.

"We have just had word of the first attack against the soft underbelly of Europe," he said. "This is the beginning of the end."

It was breakfast time at the advanced Allied air base in North Africa. A few pilots and grease monkeys were standing at the edge of the field when the P-38 set its wheels down.

A young American pilot in a fur-lined coat stepped down from the plane. He was grinning. And he was talking fast.

"Someone's definitely catching hell over there," he said, waving his thumb toward Sicily, "and I'll give you one guess who it is."

Tall, good-looking Lieutenant Robert S. Bleile of Seaford, Delaware, had a story to tell. He was the first pilot back from the Sicilian battle ground.

"What's it like, Bob?" somebody asked him.

"Let me get a cup of coffee and I'll tell you," he replied.

A gang followed him into the mess, where he sat down to a table and between gulps of hot black coffee outlined his flight.

"I could see a chain of smoke and flame ten miles inland," Bleile said. "At sea I could see Allied warships shelling without

interruption. Some of the warships dashed in close to the shore and fired salvos and then swooped out again. Boy, what a battle picture! I never expect to see anything like it again.

"I never saw so many ships in my life. I could distinguish destroyers like cigars weaving through the cobalt water. I saw bigger ships; they looked like battleguns, with wreaths of smoke rising from their turrets. It looked like they were letting loose with everything. The landing barges looked like squirming black fish. They made a big wake, and they seemed everywhere—waves of them dashing toward Sicily in relays and others piling in up on the beaches."

When he was some miles from Sicily, Bleile saw the first signs of the great battle as he spied grayish-white smoke.

"It was 6:30 A. M.," he said, "and the sun was still at the far end of the island casting shadows on the beaches, but I soon began to appreciate the tremendous battle raging below as I flew over it for thirty minutes and watched the curtain of our fire searing the coast and island. I realized that someone was definitely catching hell, and I knew it wasn't us."

Roaring over the indented coastline Bleile found no enemy opposition.

"I saw what looked like two planes far below," he explained, "but their attention was being given to the invading forces. What fascinated me as I coasted along were the antics of the attacking warships. They ran toward shore and pumped shells into the land defenses, and then swung away. The barges seemed everywhere—as I scanned the sea and horizon, there seemed to be a never-ending stream of them.

"It was a damn good show."

Veteran United Press war correspondent Richard McMilland spoke up.

"I suppose," he said, "this was your most exciting operation."

"Well," said Bleile, grinning and stroking his stubby chin, "this was only my second operation."

In the dawn's early light there was flame around all the coast towns—Licata, Gela, Pozzallo, Pachino, Noto, Syracuse.

Over an area of a hundred miles on Sicily's southeast coast American, British and Canadian soldiers piled off the landing barges and scrambled ashore.

Two German tank regiments—units of the Elite Hermann Goering Panzer Division—held Gela as the units of the American Seventh Army poured onto the beaches lying in front of the town.

The ensuing twenty-four hours saw the fiercest fighting of the expedition and four times the town of Gela changed hands.

Twice American troops were driven back to the beach by German tanks, and each time they hurled the enemy back until a bridgehead was firmly secured.

As the Americans fell away for the second time, General George Patton—his men affectionately refer to him as "Blood and Guts"—leaped from his landing barge, waded ashore and took personal command of his troops.

Shells from the American and British warships screamed over the doughboys' heads and into the German tanks. It was the first time in the war that ships had been used against tanks. Wave after wave of fresh American troops swarmed ashore from troop ships and landing barges.

Yard by yard the Americans drove the enemy back.

By sunset not only was the town retaken but the Germans were several miles beyond the town and the American forces were well established.

Patton's own courage and the high fighting qualities of his troops earned warm congratulations from Eisenhower when the Commander in Chief visited Patton's headquarters after the battle.

The Canadians went ashore on the sands of Cape Passero.

Some Royal Canadian Engineers from Nova Scotia and two companies of the Ontario Regiment crouched down and moved up the beach. Machine-gun bullets, though not as many as they

had expected, burst around the barges. Bren guns were firing all around.

Some beach defenses, those that had not been knocked out, were still firing. A coastal battery that lay half way between the beach and the town of Pachino was sending volley after volley of six-inch shells that sliced into the sea around the beaches. But the Canadians, remembering Dieppe, were not to be denied. They bore in, established a wide bridgehead and moved inland.

The British troops landed in the vicinity of Syracuse. They found the going tough. The Germans and Italians fought back hard and desperately. But the warships shelled the Axis troops and the British soldiers edged forward.

From Syracuse to Licata towns fell—Avola, Pachino, Pozzallo, Scoglitti, Gela, Ispica, Rosolini, Noto. Syracuse went down to the British. Inland probed the new American Seventh Army, the British Eighth.

The Americans, on the left, were having the hardest time of all. Against them seven counter-attacks were thrown, one spear headed by forty-five tanks. All were thrown back and the Americans plodded ahead toward the center of the island.

The tall, white-haired, bronzed American general was tickled—and proud.

"It was the damnedest sight you ever saw," an infantry colonel told him. "Those kids really hung a haymaker on the chins of those German tanks."

Major-General Joseph Swing of Newark, New Jersey, airborne combat expert on Eisenhower's staff, had just stepped off a landing barge onto the sands of Sicily.

"Yes," said the colonel, "they really put on a show."

Other officers came up to sing the praises of Swing's boys from Texas and North Carolina and Maine and Illinois, who had dropped out of the skies over Sicily to write one of the most brilliant chapters of courage and daring in American military history.

The forty-nine-year-old commander of the United States Eleventh Air-borne Division hopped into a jeep and went inland to talk to his boys. He found them in high spirits.

"We've got the number of these German babies now," said a dusty kid of twenty-one from Louisiana. "We can lick that German infantry any time, any place."

Swing pieced together the story of the American glider and parachute troops who carried out the greatest air-borne operation of the war. "This operation," said Swing, "has proved the air-borne division."

General Montgomery told Swing:

"The operations of the air-borne troops which landed in the enemy's rear on the Eighth Army sector advanced our operations by a week."

Yes, General Swing was tickled and proud. He had every reason to be glad. His boys had pulled off a great show.

"So successful were the landings of our glider and parachute troops," Swing said, "that they were able to safeguard the initial Allied landings from the sea and hold off German tank attacks which might have placed the whole operation in fateful delay."

The importance of the air-borne operations is attested by Montgomery's statement. But if they were important in the British sector, they were even more important to the American landings near Gela. There enemy armored formations struck at our forces during actual landings.

"Fortunately for the success of our operations there," Swing explained, "one air-borne combat team with light howitzers and other infantry weapons had landed in the area and taken positions covering the juncture of two of our task forces.

"They took the brunt of the German attack. They stood off the German panzers all day Sunday and well into Monday before they finally got reinforcements and were finally able to throw off the German threat and advance. If that one lone combat

team had not been on the spot when the attack was delivered by the Germans, then the whole operation might well have ended in fateful delay, in that one area at least. The Germans could have rolled up our whole line if they had been able to drive our troops into the sea.

"The effectiveness with which our air-borne troops fought off the heaviest German tanks—including some Mark Sixes, which Germans call 'Tiger Tanks'—with light antitank weapons was borne out by the battle field itself.

"When the German attack made our heavy equipment become stranded on a false beach two hundred yards from shore, naval units gave the air-borne men a wonderful screening fire—I believe the first time that destroyers were ever used in action for antitank work—and the troops worked masterfully. I saw one field shortly afterwards where thirteen German tanks still smouldered. Most of them were knocked out in this engagement. General Troy Middleton commanding the Forty-fifth Division was so pleased with the work of the air-borne unit he tried to keep them. He was sold.

"After that action men came back out of the lines full of fight. They were convinced before they went into battle they could take the measure of the German infantrymen. After fighting they were sure they could take on and lick the German armor as well. Our men proved themselves."

Swing said casualties were very light.

"All of us who had anything to do with the planning and execution of the movement were agreeably surprised. The air-borne operations contributed heavily to the success of the invasion and had a large part in the fast development of our successes.

"It was the first time in history that a self-contained unit complete with its own engineers, artillery, ammunition and quartermasters was committed to battle by air. It is a far step forward from the former method of using small groups of parachutists

to drop behind enemy lines simply to seize or destroy a specific point. This was no raiding unit. It was a powerful force—a complete division ready for action and able, in fire power, to compare favorably with an infantry division.”

Swing explained that the air-borne troops made their assault after a perilous flight across the open sea in bad weather and made droppings in complete darkness instead of in moonlight as planned.

“Despite these disadvantages they delivered their blows, carried out their missions. So now as the invasion goes ahead we can see how the use of air-borne troops has advanced from the raiding-parachutist stage of the Russian maneuvers in nineteen thirty-six—to the German paratrooper dropping on strong points in Poland and France—to the mass use of air-borne troops by the Germans in the capture of Crete, down to the present day. It’s a striking history of compressed development, that will mean much to future operations.”

Swing told about one howitzer crew which was knocked off its feet twice by a German tank but got up each time and finally knocked out the tank at a hundred yards. The watching infantry cheered them.

“God, those kids have got guts and can fight,” he added. “They are just kids. Their average age is twenty-one.”

There had not been much rest for the Americans in the ten days since they had put foot on Sicily. At first there had been hard fighting, but once the bridgeheads were established and the Yanks moved inland, they had been going at a fast clip.

They were rolling back the Germans and Italians on the double quick.

On this hot Sunday morning of July eighteenth the Americans were over the main mountain backbone of Sicily and heading north. American tanks edged forward from fold to fold in the hills sweeping the way clear. Behind came the motorized troops.

White dust boiling up from the roads and coiling and twining in serpentine locks was thick and choking.

A jeep stopped beside the road to let a group of Yanks get their breath and just settle a bit. Their faces were white masks and their eyes red-rimmed from rubbing them.

"We've got these bastards on the run," said a boy from Minnesota. "At last we're really on the ball."

"What I can't figure out," said a boy from Alabama, "is why they don't fight more than they do. We are going to run ourselves to death trying to catch up with them. At this rate we'll be in Rome in a couple of months."

In his Berchtesgaden retreat or wherever he was, Hitler felt the storm growing. Reports from Sicily piled higher on his desk. There was nothing in them to give him any hope. They only told of Allied successes.

Once Hitler's panzers had rolled through the mountains of Greece with speed that had amazed the world. But even more astonishing were the things the Americans, the British and the Canadians were doing in Sicily. And theirs was only an amphibious operation.

The big towns were falling like wheat before a reaper. Hitler could look at his desk calendar and read the fateful story:

July tenth—Gela, Licata, Pachino.

July eleventh—Syracuse

July fourteenth—Augusta

July sixteenth—Agrigento

July twentieth—Enna

July twenty-second—Palermo

Catania was practically surrounded. The British were blasting its outer defenses. From the sea Allied warships hurled shells into the city.

The American advance was like lightning.

On July twenty-second more than twenty towns fell to the Allies, most of them to the American steam roller which knifed

west and northwest from Agrigento through the mountainous country to take Palermo and bring all western Sicily under Allied control.

The unexpectedly fast Allied advance was achieved at almost no cost of life or equipment. The Italians made little attempt to resist. They fell back at the mere approach of the United States vanguard and gave up strong fortifications without firing a shot.

The Italian Twenty-sixth Assietta Division surrendered almost en masse. Germans fired on Italians walking forward to surrender, and Italians shot German officers.

By July twenty-third the last stage of the Battle of Sicily had been reached.

General Guzzoni's Italian army was completely defeated and demoralized.

Upwards of eighty thousand Axis prisoners were in Allied hands.

There remained little more than the mopping up of the island except for the northeastern peninsula jutting out from the Catania-Mount Etna-Naso line.

The battle positions much resembled the closing stage of the Tunisian campaign. The Catania bottleneck might be likened to Enfidaville, and Catania to the key base of Tunis.

Hitler knew Sicily was lost.

Mussolini listening for the sound of American Fortresses over Rome again was ready to sound the alarm that Italy had been invaded.

It was only four miles from the Sicilian port of Messina to the Italian mainland.

Yesterday it had been Sicily. Tomorrow . . .

## EPILOGUE

A WIND was rising . . . and the earth was stirring. . . .

For freedom-loving peoples, shackled and unshackled, it was a good wind, whispering encouragement and hope in the dark hours; for Adolf Hitler and his like it was an ill-wind, sweeping across a land coveted but unconquered.

It had been gentle at first, like an autumn breeze ruffling a field of wheat, but now it was strong and unconquerable, sweeping evil from its path.

The tortured, starved men and women of Nazi-occupied Europe, struggling in their chains across a land of hate, desolation and carnage, felt the stirring of the earth and saw in the heavens the gathering clouds of a man-made storm of smoke and steel.

From Norway to Greece the soldiers of the Reich were beginning to wonder, beginning to ask each other questions. The Axis camp was uneasy.

After almost four years of war the Europe that had been so tight under Adolf Hitler's thumb, the Europe that had shrunk in terror at the very mention of his name, the Europe that had felt the lash of his Gestapo and stood up before his firing squads, was frightened no longer. Europe was fighting back—silently in Norway and Belgium and Holland, openly in Poland and Jugoslavia and France.

Adolf Hitler was no longer master of Europe.

And in Berchtesgaden, or wherever he was, the "Little Corporal" could look at his maps and study the histories and know that his evil career was reaching an end. Already he could hear the rising wind, the gathering storm of the United Nations.

South and west, the Mediterranean was gone. Rommel had

fled, a sick and beaten man. Africa was in Allied hands. Around encircled, restless Europe, the drums of the United Nations were marking time.

The earth was stirring in the Campagna, stirring in Germany, France, Holland, Belgium, Norway, Greece, Jugoslavia, tiny Luxembourg, even Austria.

No sooner had the campaign ended in Tunisia when the Allied air forces began hammering the soft under-belly of Europe, unloading hundreds of tons of bombs on Italy, Sicily, Sardinia. From the west across the Channel came other bombers to pulverize Hitler's stronghold—Germany.

Africa had been secured for the base intended, and the air war, bringing whimpers and threats from the very people who pioneered it, was but the softening up phase for the ground troops.

For three years it had been Hitler's war, but this was the United Nations' year. The end of the day in Tunisia had meant the beginning of a long black night somewhere else. Adolf Hitler could guess, and he would probably be right.

A mighty Thor stood with upraised hammer.

Cornered and ranting, Hitler waited for the blow to fall. And waiting, too, was the gnome-like little man Churchill once called Der Fuehrer's lackey—Mussolini.

The hammer was back now, poised for the knock-out blow.

The Germans and Italians were asking themselves—where and when?

For Hitler and Mussolini time was at last running out just as surely as a clock without a winding-key. They waited, not knowing when the end would come. And as they waited, they sweated. The waiting rubbed raw their nerves and the sweat turned cold and chilled them.

And all the time the Germans and Italians watched the sky, feared the day, dreaded the night.

When will they strike? Where will the blow fall?

These were the questions the Germans and Italians asked.

Two men held the answers. Franklin Delano Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.

American troops had become of age and were at last on the march.

Now there was a springboard to Berlin.



# INDEX

## A

- Acland, Sergeant A. W., 313
- African campaign:
  - beginning of, 13 ff.
  - value of, 373
- Afrika Korps, 155, 207, 243, 269, 273, 328
- air war, 358
- Alexander, Gen. Sir Harold, 300, 327-328, 341, 363
- Algeria, 52 ff.
- Algiers, 61, 66, 68, 83, 90
  - battle of, 148-155
  - landing, 129 ff.
- Algiers convoy, 77, 79
- Allen, Major-Gen. Terry, 304 ff., 365
- Allied supplies, tons, 360
- Allied troops, weaknesses of, 241-246
- American army:
  - criticism of, 366 ff.
  - improvement of, 246, 285, 313-315
  - weaknesses of, 242-246
- American artillery, 315
- American Combat Command B, 241, 287
- American Combat Team, 252, 257 ff.
- American Liberty ship, 79
- American Rangers, 80, 83, 129
- American Second Corps, 326-327, 337, 338
  - meeting with Eighth Army, 313
- American Seventh Army in Sicily, 382
- American troops (*see* American army)

- Anderson, General Kenneth, 154, 155, 249, 252, 258 ff., 355, 356, 373
- Anglo-American relations, 314
- Arab Empire, 56
- Arab Free Corps, 338
- Arabs, 83, 66, 149, 151, 184, 189, 203
  - Germans dressed as, 222
  - of North Africa, 56, 58
  - villages of, 203
- armistice, in North Africa, 190
- armistice terms, 275
- Arnim, Col.-Gen. Jurgen von, 269, 322, 328, 339, 341, 354 ff., 354-355, 363, 373
- Arzu, 61, 78, 87, 88, 183, 184, 192
- Atlas Mountains, 203
- Ault, Phil, 25, 31, 283
- Aurora*, 375
- Australian soldiers, 15
- Autrey, Bill, 179
- Avery, William B., 187
- Axis collapse in Tunisia, factors in, 358
- Axis loss in Africa, 360

## B

- Bald Hill, 250, 251, 259 ff., 336, 338
- Barre, General, 214-215
- Battle of Britain, 209
- Baumsenge, Major-Gen., 348
- Bayer, Corporal Jacque, 311
- "Bazooka" guns, 307
- Beattie, Ed, 24, 25, 28, 30, 31, 344
- Beau Geste*, 166
- Beck, Lieut.-Col. Clarence, 331
- Beja, 211, 260

Bentley, Major Bill, 67  
 Bentley, Sub-Lieut. Peter, 98, 103-105  
 Berbers, 83  
 Bizerte, 201 ff.  
     occupation of, 344-345  
 Bizerte Neck, 337, 338  
 Blade Force, 211, 238, 240, 241  
 Bleile, Lieut. Robert S., 382-383  
 Blida, 141-148  
 "Blue birds," 161, 164  
 boats, landing, 167-169  
 Bolitho, Capt. Michael, 94, 99, 99 ff.  
     death of, 117  
 Bône, 154, 202 ff., 244-245  
 Bordj Toun, 241  
 Borj bou Hamra, 336  
 Borovietz, Major-Gen. Willibald, 346 ff.  
 Bougie, 154, 196, 204  
 Boyd, Captain Max, 35, 73-77  
 Bradford, Capt. John, 132 ff., 251  
 "Bradford's Troops," 251  
 Bradley, Major-Gen. Omar, 298  
 bread, 58-59  
 Britain, Battle of, 209  
 British Eighth Army, 285, 319, 365  
     meeting with American Second Corps, 313  
 British First Army, 28, 201 ff., 246  
 British Royal Navy, 28, 201  
 British Sixth Armored Division, 211, 252  
 Brodie, Lieut. Commander Robert, Jr. ("Steve"), 172-176  
 Browning, Lieut. James C., 121  
 Buckley, Lieut. Charles D., 121  
 Buckner, Brig.-Gen. S. B., 275  
 Bunnelle, Robert, 26  
 Burghardt, First Lieut. William C., 218-219

## C

Cagney, James, 5  
 camouflage, German, 224-225  
 Canadian invasion fleet, 382  
 Canadian officers, 379  
 Canadians, 384-385  
 Canadian soldiers, 15  
 Cape Bon, 341, 345, 349 ff.

Cape Serrat, 251  
 Casablanca, 37, 61, 66, 68, 77, 78, 81, 84, 90  
     battle of, 159-179  
 Casablanca Conference, 273-281  
 Cavell, Edith, 46  
 C. C. B., 248  
 Chasseurs d'Afrique, 196  
 Chesley, Lieut. Franklin, 179  
 Chiang Kai-shek, Generalissimo, 279  
 Chicago *Daily News*, 26, 129  
 Christmas Day, battle on, 258  
 Christmas Eve, 253-257  
 Churchill, Winston, 8, 10, 17, 64, 69  
     at Casablanca, 273 ff.  
 Clark, Maj.-Gen. Mark W., 17, 18, 19-23, 194  
 climate, of North Africa, 54  
 Coldstream Guards, 99, 252, 253  
 Cole, Lieut. John, 95 ff., 110, 111 ff.  
     death of, 119  
 Colgin, Corporal Harold, 242  
 Combat Command B, American, 241, 287  
 commandos, 81, 86  
 Conical Hill, 250, 259 ff.  
 Copling, Sergeant, 266  
 Corap, Gen. André Georges, 46  
 Corps France d'Afrique, 327  
 Coster, Major Don, 36, 37, 63-71, 75, 184 ff.  
 Coukle, Capt. Anthony, 39  
 Courtney, Capt. C. J., 19  
 Crathern, Capt. Charles, 184  
 Craven, Capt. John, 132 ff.  
 Cunningham, Admiral Sir Andrew Browne, 375  
 Cunningham, Chris, 25, 31

## D

Dakar, 63, 163  
 Darlan, Gen. Jean François, 151, 153, 154, 194  
 Darroch, Lieut. James W., 172-173, 176  
 De Gaulle, at Casablanca, 277, 279  
 Depth Charge Junction, 178  
 Derbyshire Yeomanry, 343  
 Dickinson, Bill, 23, 24, 26, 30

Dieppe raid, 17, 31  
 discipline, military, 368-369  
 diseases, of North Africa, 55-56  
 Disher, Leo, 31, 92 ff.  
 Djebel Abiod, 206, 207  
 Djebel Berda, 321  
 Djebel Chemti, 338  
 Djebel Mcheltat, 320, 321  
 Djebel Rmel, 329  
 Djebel Sefsouf, 326  
 Djebel Zarour, 341  
 Djedeida, 222 ff.  
 Dobie, Major David, 262-268  
 Dodgers, 4  
 Doolittle, Lieut.-Gen. Jimmy, 42,  
 184, 188, 189, 191  
 Duncan, Lieut. Paul Eric Aver, 97,  
 106-111, 118, 120  
 Dunkirk, 14, 15, 86, 273, 349, 350,  
 351, 378

## E

Earheart, Private First Class James  
 E., Jr., 94, 121  
 Eddekhlila, 337, 339  
 Eighth Army (*see* British Eighth  
 Army)  
 Eighth Army's Eleventh Hussars,  
 342, 343  
 Eisenhower, Lieut.-Gen. Dwight  
 David, 6, 15-18, 23, 29, 85, 133,  
 196, 201, 202, 212, 298, 363, 370,  
 375, 378  
 Eisenhower Platz, 16, 26  
 El Alamein, 319  
 El Bathan, 229  
 El Biar, 149-155  
 El Guettar, 304, 306-308  
 Empire troops, 15  
 Europe, plans for invasion of, 274  
 Evans, Joe, 26

## F

Fedala, 159  
 Ferguson, Lieut. John, Jr., 174  
 Feriana, 297  
 Ferryville, 338, 341  
 Fielder, Captain Leo, 291  
 "Fighting First" Infantry Division,  
 304

Fighting French, 47  
 Fink, Lieut. Joseph, 295  
 First Armored Division, American,  
 300  
 Fondouk, 359  
 food, on board ship, 42-43  
 Foot, Lieut. J. D., 19  
 Foreign Legionnaires, 67, 69  
 Fort L'Empereur, 150  
 Fort Sidi Ferruch, 129, 130, 132,  
 133, 136, 139, 140  
 Four Freedoms, 34, 195  
 Fourth Indian Division, 355, 356  
 Frank, Clinton E., 42, 60, 89  
 Fredendall, Major-Gen. Lloyd, 297,  
 300  
 French, 18, 53-57  
   hostility against British, 69  
   surrender of, 193-195  
 French army, 66, 212 ff., 280, 301,  
 326  
 French North Africa, 45, 55, 63  
   landing in, 80-90  
 French soldiers, 327  
 Freyborg, Gen. Sir Bernard, 356  
 Fuller, Capt. Bob, 95, 109  
   death of, 119

## G

Gabes, 312  
 Gafsa, 300 ff.  
 Galletti, Private Sam, 242  
 Garcia, modern message to, 23  
 Garland, Judy, 164, 165  
 General Grant tanks, 225, 286  
 General Sherman tanks, 286  
 German Master Race, 57  
 German prisoners in Africa, 326,  
 372  
 German soldier, 371-373  
 Gestapo, 278  
 Gibraltar, 61, 105  
 Gilmore, Lieut. James D., 291-292  
 Giraud, Gen. Henri Honoré, 45-51,  
 154, 196, 215-216, 382  
   at Casablanca, 277, 279  
   escape of, 46-47  
   proclamation of, 189  
 global war, 275  
 G-Men, 276, 280

- Goddard, Major James H., 36 ff.,  
52-63, 74-75, 183, 184  
Goebbels, Dr. Joseph, 9  
Goering, Hermann, 9  
Goering Division, Hermann, 353  
Grable, Betty, 164, 165  
Grand Dorsal Mountains, 268, 269  
Grant, General, tanks, 225  
Grant, Gen. U. S., 275  
Greece, 389  
Green Hill, 250, 251, 259 ff., 336, 337  
"green" troops, 241-242  
Grenadier Guards, 253  
Ground troops, cooperation with air  
arm, 358  
Guzzoni, General, 390
- H
- Hamblen, Col. Archelaus L., 18  
Hammamet Lf., 354  
Hampshire regiment, 247  
Hamra, 285 ff.  
Hardige, Lieut. Quentin, 175, 176  
Harmon, Major-Gen. Ernest E.,  
345-346  
*Harland*, 105, 108, 109, 112, 113,  
117, 118  
Henke, Milburn, 13-14  
Hermann Goering Division, 352  
Hewitt, Rear Admiral Henry Kent,  
159  
Hill 609, 333-336, 358  
Himmler, Heinrich, 278  
Hindenburg, President von, 278  
Hirohito, 275, 278  
Hitler, Adolf, 6, 9, 34, 62, 70, 273 ff.,  
319, 389, 391  
directions to commanders, 348-349  
Holden-White, Capt. Harold Vere,  
94, 99  
Hollingsworth, Ensign Lloyd, 178-  
179  
Holmes, Col. Julius C., 19  
Hopkins, Harry, 69  
Hornsby, Private Pressley, 287  
Horr, Private Robert F., 94, 121  
Hovey, Graham, 295
- I
- Ingraham, Private Clark, 311  
International News Service, 295  
invasion of Europe, 71  
Ireland, 4, 14  
Irish Brigade, 253  
Islam, 57  
Italian infantry, 288  
Italian prisoners, 293, 326, 351 ff.,  
372, 390  
Italy, plans for invasion of, 275
- J
- Jakob, Lieut. Frank, 310, 312  
*J'Amique*, 89  
Japan, 275  
*Jean Bart*, 81, 85, 159-163  
Jefna, 327  
Jensen, Capt. Richard, 297  
Jewell, Lieut. N. L. A., 49-51  
"Jock Columns," 206  
Jones, Corporal, 264  
Jordan, Philip, 155, 202, 205  
Juin, General, 151
- K
- Kasba, 166, 172  
Kasserine Pass, 285 ff.  
Kasserine Plain, 285  
Kasserine Village, 286  
Kelly, Admiral Monroe, 173-174  
Kelly, Capt. John, 331  
Kesselring, General, 214-215  
King, Admiral Ernest J., 69  
King, Bill, 211, 213 ff.  
Kluckhohn, Frank, 27, 28, 29  
Koons, Corp. Franklin M., 17  
Krause, Major-Gen. Fritz, 346 ff.  
Krum, Colonel, 25
- L
- La Llemand, M. Octave, 190-191  
Lampedusa, 376-377  
Lampione, 377  
landing boats, 167-169  
La Senia, 61, 67, 85, 90  
Laval, Pierre, 9, 48  
Lawrence, Lieut. George, 121  
Leahy, Admiral, 65  
leaflets, 83-84  
Le Bardo, 341  
Legionnaires, foreign, 67, 69

Lemnitzer, Brigadier Gen. Lyman, 18  
 Le Patourel, Major "Pat," 247  
 Les Andalouses, 61  
 Libya, 243  
 Licata, 385  
 Lieutenant, unnamed, story of, 264-265  
 Lincoln, Abraham, 274  
 Linosa, 377  
 "Little Maginot" fortifications, 319  
 Livingstone, Capt. R. T., 19  
 Logan, Walter, 280-281  
 London, 3, 18  
 London *Daily Mail*, 280  
 London *News-Chronicle*, 155  
 Longstop Hill, 250, 252 ff.  
 "Long Toms," 315, 329, 330, 334, 366  
 Lord's Prayer, 379  
 Luftwaffe, 206, 371-372  
     at Tunis, 218 ff.  
 Lyantey, Marshal, 196-197

## M

MacArthur's troops on Bataan, 349  
 MacClosky, Colonel, 60-62  
 MacClosky, Major, 184  
 McClure, Gen. Robert, 26-28  
 McCutcheon, Capt. Alfred H., 337  
 McLellan, L. R., 30  
 McMillan, Richard, 383  
 Madison, Major Graham, 191  
 Madrid, 281  
 Maknassy, 301-302  
 Malta, 62, 79  
 Mareth Line, 269, 285, 300-302, 319, 328  
 Mark Sixes, 387  
 Mark Ten American tank destroyers, 307  
 Marshall, Gen. George C., 15, 69  
 Marshall, Lieut.-Col. George, 95, 98, 105, 110, 112, 115  
     death of, 121  
 Massicault, 252  
 Mast, General, 140 ff.  
 Master Race, 57  
 Mateur, 211, 259, 335  
 meat, 59

Mediterranean, 71  
 Medjez-el-Bab, 211, 241, 252, 304, 359  
 Meheri Zebbeus mine, 303  
 Meierle, Private Paul, 311  
 Mers-el-Kebir naval battle, 69, 81, 108  
 Messe, General Giovanni, 357-358  
 Meyrick, Commander, 97, 103, 106, 114, 116, 117  
     death of, 122  
 Michelier, Vice-Admiral, 195  
 Middle East, 71, 367  
 Middleton, Drew, 26, 28, 29, 211, 213 ff., 253  
 Middleton, Gen. Troy, 387  
 Miki, 31-34  
 Miller, Colonel, 60, 62  
 Mirage, 55  
 Mitchell, Billy, bombers, 301  
 Moffo, Private Joseph, Jr., 381  
 Mohammed, 57  
 Monstaganem, 89  
 Montgomery, General, 273, 326, 365, 386  
 Moore, Capt. Bidwell, 330  
 Moore, Sergeant Joe., 381  
 Morocco, 52, 54, 55, 165  
 Morris, Joe Alex, 31, 33  
 Moseley, Lieut. Wallace Dempsey, 98-99  
 Moslems, 57-59  
 Moslem women, 58  
 Mosques, 57-58  
 Mount Achkel, 340  
 Mount Chemiti, 340  
 Murphy, U. S. Consul-General Robert, 64-67, 151, 153  
 Mussolini, Benito, 13, 34, 274, 392

## N

Negroes, in North Africa, 56  
 Negro soldiers, 41, 44, 71-72  
 Nehring, General, 214-215, 222, 226  
 Nueffer, Major-Gen., 348  
*New York Herald Tribune*, 26  
*New York Times*, 26  
 Nissen huts, 4, 14  
 Norgaard, Norland, 27, 28, 30, 34

North Africa, 18, 20, 52, 71  
 customs in, 56-59  
 French territories of, 55  
 Norwegians, 70

## O

O'Daniel, Col. "Iron Mike," 151  
 officers, American, 244, 368  
 Oliver, Private Raymond, 310  
 Oran, 61, 66, 68, 77-82, 108, 116, 212  
   battle of, 86-87, 90, 116-125, 183-197  
   burial, American dead, 192  
   convoy, 77  
 Oued Zarga, 239, 242  
 Ousseltia valley, 304

## P

Painton, Fred, 295  
 Pantelleria, 374 ff.  
 Papik, Private Zoltan, 310, 312  
 paratroops, 61, 204, 381  
 Parris, John, 25, 27-31, 181, 271  
 Patton, Major Gen. George S., 195,  
   297 ff., 328, 340, 384  
 Pavesi, Admiral Gino, 375  
 Payne, Lieut. Carl W., 188  
 Pearl Harbor, 8, 13, 37, 63, 64, 274,  
   368  
 Peebles, Private Albert, 192  
 Pétain, Marshal Henri, 48, 195  
 Peters, Capt. Frederick Thornton,  
   93, 97 ff.  
   mission of, 94  
 Philippeville, 154, 204  
 Phillips, Major Joseph, 25, 26  
 Pimms, navigator, 101, 119  
 Port Lyautey, 163, 164, 165, 166,  
   173, 177  
   Roosevelt at, 280  
 prejudice, 57  
 press conference at Casablanca, 276,  
   277  
 Price, Ward, 280  
 prisoners, German and Italian,  
   351 ff., 372, 390

## R

Rabat, 66, 85, 163  
 fall of, 195

Rabat highway, 177, 178  
 racial doctrine, Nazi, 57  
 R.A.F., 209, 245  
 Raff, Colonel Edison, 381  
 Ramsay, Guy, 29  
 Randall, Sergeant Joseph A., 312-313  
*Readers Digest*, 295  
 rebel yells, 86  
 Reynolds, Ed, 33  
 Reynolds, Quent, 33  
 Richardson, Major Guy R., 191  
 Robotnick, Private Louis, 243  
 Rommel, Field Marshal Erwin, 207,  
   226, 269, 273, 285, 287, 288, 292,  
   319 ff.  
   flight from Tunisia, 323-325  
 Roosevelt, Brig.-Gen. Teddy, Jr.,  
   305-306  
 Roosevelt, Capt. Quentin, Jr., 306  
 Roosevelt, Col. Elliott, 277  
 Roosevelt, Franklin D., 8, 9, 17, 144,  
   382  
   at Casablanca, 273 ff.  
 Rosen, Major David, 233 ff.  
 Royal Airforce Coastal Command,  
   78  
 Royal Navy, attack on French fleet,  
   212  
 Russell, Ned, 23 ff., 128, 199  
 Russia, 3  
 Ryder, General, 129, 140, 151, 153,  
   365

## S

Safi, 163  
 Saint Barbe, 185-186  
 Saint Cloud, 193  
 Saint Leu, 87, 184, 190  
 Sbeitla, 286  
*Sebago*, 101  
 Sebu River, 165, 166  
 second front, 27, 37  
 Selcke, Lieut. Benne, 346  
 Sened station, 302  
 Senegalese soldiers, French, 138-139  
 Sherman, General, tanks, 286  
 Shore, Dinah, 164  
 Sicilian Channel, 350

Sicily, 378 ff.  
 calendar of conquest, 389-390  
 prisoners in, 390  
 Sidi-bel-Abbès, 90, 184, 189  
 Sidi bou Zid, 286  
 Smith, Capt. Percy L., 321  
 Sneath, Lieut. Mervin, 302-303  
 Souk-el-Arba, 244-245  
 Spadillo airfield, 375  
 Spanish Armada, 76  
 Spanish Morocco, 67, 68, 165  
 Sponeck, Major-Gen. Graf von, 356  
 Stalin, Premier Joseph, 3, 279  
 Stoneman, Bill, 26, 28, 129 ff., 138-139, 151 ff., 213 ff., 253, 260  
 Stroma, Nick, 219-220  
 "Stuka Acres," 240  
 supplies, Allied, 361  
 Swing, Major-Gen. Joseph, 385 ff.  
 Syracuse, 385

## T

Tabarka, 205-206  
 Tafaraoui, 61, 90, 184, 187  
 Tangier, 281  
 tank destroyers, 288  
 tanks, 286, 370  
     American vs German, 243  
 Tebessa, 286  
 Tebourba, 221 ff., 223, 242  
 Teboursouk, 252  
 terrain of North Africa, 54  
 Thala, 287 ff.  
 Thelepte, 286  
 Thyng, Major Harrison R., 188  
 Tojo, Gen. Eiki, 13, 34  
 Trevor, Col. Tom, 129, 132, 140 ff.  
 Tripoli, conquest of, 273  
 Tunis, 201 ff., 216  
     occupation of, 344  
 Tunisia, 52, 55, 285-315  
     Axis collapse in, 358  
 Turnage, Capt. William R., 122

## U

"Unconditional Surrender Conference," 275  
 United Nations, 273, 276, 278, 279, 392  
 United Press, 31

## V

Vaerst, Major-Gen. von, 348  
 Vichy France, 9, 22  
 Victorian Cross, 247  
 venereal diseases, 56  
 Vincent, Lieut.-Col. Stewart T., 129

## W

Wales, Lieut. Victor, Jr., 110, 121  
*Walney*, 81, 94 ff., 101-102  
 Walsh, Major William J., 192  
 Washington, 7, 367  
 Wavell, General, 373  
 weather, 244  
 West Africa, 63, 71  
 Western Desert, 242  
 Weygand, Gen. Maxime, 65  
 White, Bill, 26, 27, 28, 33, 253  
 Williams, Sergeant William, 288 f.  
 women, Moslem, 58, 165  
 Wooten, Lieut. Roland, 188  
 Wright, Capt. Jerauld, 19, 49-51

## X

Xerxes fleet, 76

## Y

York, Sergeant, 5  
 Youks les Bains, 289, 291

## Z

Zouaves, 196





















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